



PROMOTING GENDER FAIRNESS IN LANGUAGE AND SOCIETY THROUGH EDUCATION AND AWARENESS EDUCATION

Isaac O. Ogah

Department of Chemistry, Faculty of Natural and Applied Science, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education,
Rumuolumeni, Port Harcourt.

Abstract: This paper looks at how gender fairness should be implemented in the society to minimize women harassment and brutality to a reasonable extent because the attitude of the kind of life style one chooses to live is not innate but acquired. Therefore, women should be allowed to enjoy equal right and resources with men. However, this paper focused on the meaning of gender fairness, gender fairness in the use of language and general body contact in both male and female. English language is a gender language. It addresses everyone as a male in most cases. When someone's sex is not known, male gender is used to address that person in English instead of neutral form of words except for inanimate objects. This paper also elucidates gender fairness in English Language, issues and prospects as it relates to curriculum development. The best way to resolve conflict is through educating or orienting the people involved. If gender fairness is integrated in the curriculum, it will be a better avenue for orientation and awareness. The paper concludes that female forms of words should be used as often as the male forms to ensure gender fairness in English language. It was suggested among others that students should be part of gender fairness awareness by carrying out investigations on gender discrimination in their environment and bring them for discussion and possible solution in the classroom.

Keywords: Gender fairness, language use, sociolinguistics, education, equality

Introduction

Gender is part of our lives and also a social product. We are not born men and women according to the book titled *The Second Sex* written by Simon de Beauvoir in 1950, instead, we acquire the attitude and life style we live as they are assigned to us by our beliefs and culture. Biblically, there is gender discrepancy in the book of 1st Corinthians 14: 34-35 according to King James Version (2012) where women are compelled to keep mute in the churches never to ask even questions but to go home and ask their husbands whatever they need to know. From time immemorial, some distinct positions are held by men alone both in the political sectors and communities e.g. president of a country, organizations that involve men and women like church leaders, Imam etc. It was difficult if not impossible for one to find such ruling positions being occupied by women until these recent times.

Gender and language learning cannot be separated. This is because all beliefs and cultures of a particular society are rooted in the language (Fairclough, 1989 in Nazife, 2014). Language remains the most crucial factor of the

entire universe. Interpretation of culture, beliefs, duties and even words are done with the use of language by human beings which are males and females. Human beings are said to be born equal but there are lots of inequality between male and female in the use of words, cultural practising, ruling positions etc. This inequality is reflected in language use especially.

Gender fairness is one of the major issues in sociolinguistic studies. Traditional ethics has it that men are superior to women which indicates that gender disparity has been in existence for a very long time (International Planned Parenthood Federation 2017). Gender fairness is a human right. Both male and female are supposed to live violent free lives, have equal privilege to increase their capabilities, assume the same opportunities and enjoy the same resources without disparities. There should be an enablement for women to be empowered to enjoy equal rights with men. This can be done through quality services, information, education and social conditions which men enjoy alone. This inequality exists in all facets of human existence of male and female counterparts and trans-genders suffer the discrimination against social, economic and public life. When there is gender fairness, sexual rights will be achieved and this is feasible only when one can wield their sexual and reproductive rights (IPPF, 2017).

Implementation of gender fairness is a pre-requisite for respecting, protecting and fulfilling the right to sexual and reproductive health as well as sustainable curriculum development. It is debatable that women are at the receiving end when it comes to gender inequality following some statistic given by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, (2000); Adacay, (2014) in Tuba, (2018) thus: (i) women make up two-thirds (66%) of labour force in the world but receive only one tenth of the world income. (ii) two-third of illiterate adults in the world are women. (iii) less than one percent of world property is for women. (iv) women and young girls are essential commodities to human traffickers etc.

Meaning of Gender Fairness

Gender fairness is a situation where male and female are given equal right and opportunities to participate in activities voluntarily at all levels. They are both allowed to enjoy equal political, social, economic, cultural benefits as well as equal responsibilities at home and beyond. Gender fairness also known as gender equality is the ability to have equal access to resources and opportunities irrespective of gender in decision making and aspirations. Gender fairness is the goal that set to be achieved. It is about the right of women in the society. According to United National International Children Emergency Fund as described by Clarke (2011), it is the right to live equal life, share resources and opportunities equally without discrimination. Men and women should be treated equally. Unpleasant practices like rape, feticide, sexual harassment, oppression tactics etc should be put to a stop in order to achieve gender fairness. Women have poor access to property ownership especially in their families where they are born, they are far more likely to be victims of mental issues and domestic violence. Gender fairness can only be achieved if these issues enslaving only women and subjecting them to be less important than their male counterparts are taken care of. Gender fairness does not actually mean that men and women will be the same but to be treated equally in terms of right, responsibilities and opportunities. When a girl child and a boy child enjoy the same merits or demerits in going to school, the same teaching methods, gender neutral curricula and academic orientation, gender fairness is achieved (UNESCO's Global Monitoring Report 2003/2004 in Philips n.d).

Gender Fairness and Curriculum Development

In the past, males tend to receive more education than the females. In most western countries and non-western countries, the gap has been handled (Cullen, 2003). Men and women have their differences when it comes to educational goal. Generally English language is gender biased. The status of being a male and female or assertive

and submissive can be described by the use of language. Language which reflects cultures and traditions introduce gender inequality exposing the curriculum (UNESCO, 2015). Symposiums, faculties, panels, congresses should be part of gender fairness awareness in order to develop the curriculum both the hidden and open curriculum. Open curriculum is lessons that are taught formally while the hidden curriculum is the ones that are taught informally which are beyond subject contents of the studies like culture, social life, patterns of behaviour etc. When gender fairness is integrated in to the curriculum development as a course of study, awareness will be created early enough. In fact, the easiest way to bring development in to the society is through education. The curriculum should be rich enough to expose what will bring peace, harmony, crises free environment and economic growth. According to Karkiner (2016) in Tuba, (2018), it is difficult to gain gender awareness at older age as well as changing already absorbed gender bias after it has been adopted by a school. So the essence of exposing it earlier enough is to expose the necessity of gender fairness in curriculum development. When gender fairness is integrated in the curriculum within and outside the fore wall of the school, it can be taught and learnt in the school at all levels hence gender is different from sex. Giddens (2000) in Tuba, (2018); Arat (2017) asserted that sex is in born which cannot be changed while gender can be learnt because it is not natural.

Furthermore, curriculum development should be problem solving and portray crises free society. It should accommodate culture and tradition of the society so that both culture and tradition will also be taught and learnt in the school. Developing curriculum to accommodate culture and tradition exposes the danger of gender bias and fairness in a milder and clearer term. The importance of integrating gender fairness awareness in curriculum development are: a) It boosts economic growth of a country through creating a wealthier society, b) It improves freedom, c) It helps to strengthen families, d) It gives room for democratic environment, e) It promotes peace and harmony (Eivind, 2017). According to Baharul Islam (2018), integration of gender fairness in the curriculum in the existing education system helps the young learners to be aware on the matter related to gender fairness and with this, stronger consciousness about the gender fairness is induced.

Gender Fairness in the Use of Language

Gender fairness should also be considered from the angle of language use. Women not only fight to gain political right in the society as well as fight to decrease marital harassment and domestic violence, they are also not considered in terms of language use in communication. It is assumed according to Hoobs, (2003) in Murni (2010) that women should speak with acute politeness when interacting with same sex peers meanwhile, men in the same situation do not do that. While men speak referring to the rules of conversation with intent facts, women speak with reference from rules of courteousness and respect (Lakoff, 1976 in Murni, 2010). In addition, researches have it that women have electable aptness in using lexical hedges and fillers for examples: (well, you see, it is like, simply request etc) tag questions like (she is caring, isn't she?), rising intonation on declaratives like (that is interesting, it is not bad, it is well said etc.), empty adjectives like (beautiful, interesting, good) and they are so good at avoiding the use of harsh swear words like (honestly speaking, to God almighty, Oh my world) (Lakoff, 1976 in Murni, 2010).

Furthermore, women are seen to be more passive than men. They talk as if they are guessing what they are saying. It is not that they are not sure of what they are saying but nature has made them to always speak from the point of politeness. According to Vanfossen (2001) in Murni,

(2010), women are good at using tag question like: it is mine, isn't it? Disclaimers like it may not be truth but...) and use questions as if they are direct statement like (did you see to that?). This kind of phrases reduces the ambitiousness that goes with speech. A study conducted by Griffin et al (1999) as recorded by Murni (2010) explained that women use non-verbal communication more than men. Some of them are body movement, eye

contact, finger signs, touch, gestures, facial expression etc. This study found out that 67.5% of females use more eye contact than males do, 75.5% of females use gestures than the male counterparts and 83.7% typically smile more often than the males do. From the above results, it is crystal clear that women are more romantic communicators than men in terms of non-verbal communication.

Another study by Logan and Johnson (2009) also discovered that females show more interest in reading comprehension and school which shows that there are different reading styles that exist between males and females. Arikan (2005) in Nazife (2014) pointed out in his study that women are known only on issues that has to do with taking care of children and house hold chores while the men sit down and watch the women turning round the house as the depicted head of the family. In total appearance characters, there is no gender fairness as the men are more favoured than women (female 42%, male 58%), total amount of talk (female 43% male 57%) and in social and occupational roles (female 39% male 61%) (Sivasligil, 2006). According to Soylemez (2011), physical appearance beauty and attractiveness of women are mostly described with more adjectives than that of men for examples (beautiful, elegance, stunning etc). In addition, personality adjectives that depict negativeness are also associated with women for examples (soft, feeble, gossipier etc) while the ones that depict famous and richness are used for men for examples (brave, fearless, heroic, affluent etc). when it comes to intelligence, Soylemez identified that only the word intelligent is used to describe how intelligent a woman is but in men, many adjectives like brilliant, bright, clever, genius are used. Males characters are said to dominate that of females in terms of occupation, domestics, social roles, indoors/outdoors activities and also speech acts (Cubukcu & Sivasligil, 2007 in Tuba, 2018). According to Seker and Dincer (2014), there are three major categories thus: attribution of professions, personality features and physical appearance in which male are more dominant than females.

Issues of Gender Fairness in English Language

Generally, men's languages are regarded as morality even when they are using vulgar words. They are viewed as normal hence they are used by men but when the same words are used by women, they are regarded as taboo especially when the words are rooted in the tradition or culture of a place. For instance, in Awarra Court Area in Ohaji/Egbema LGA of Imo state when a woman who is from Ohaji and marries Ohaji gives birth to her first child, she is forced by the tradition to shave her hair as the mother of the child while the man (father) of that same child is free. Generally, women are exempted when they are sharing village lands and property. As a woman, culture has it that you do not take part in the discussion of your girl child's bride price and so on. English language sees everyone as man except for a peculiar description. When somebody's gender is not known he, his and him can be used to describe that person except if the person is not a human being. In some special cases when it is not a human being, instead of using 'it' to describe the item, 'she', 'her' and 'hers' are used. For instance, Nigeria and her problem etc. This is common rule in English language. In English language proverb, male is the general name for human. For examples: Down fall of a man is not the end of his life, no man knows tomorrow, no food for a lazy man, etc. The proportion of women in the world out number that of men but the rate in which HE and SHE are used in English is outrageous.

It is common that people psychologically believe that those who succeed in life are mostly men. Famous women are treated as exception. Media advocates them, new paper carries it simply because the habit of being success in life is said to be that of men alone however, some prefixes like female, woman, lady and girl are used to indicate they are different sex from that of men whenever they are mentioned. For instance, some professions like doctor, lawyer, reporter, pilot etc. are attributed to men alone for the fact that they are people who are long in that practice. When women work in these fields mentioned above, words like: female doctor, woman lawyer, lady pilot, girl

reporter etc will be used while there is nothing like male doctor, man lawyer, boy reporter and so on. More so, some academic achievements/qualifications of females are written by adding suffixes to them to show disparity like Dr (Mrs), Prof (Mrs), Engr (Mrs) and so on but nothing like Dr (Mr), Prof. (Mr) and vice versa.

In English language, women are generally despised for instance: a weak man is described as being womanish instead of “manish”. A flirting man is called womanizer instead of “manizer”. A man who enjoys being with and giving attention to women is called ladies’ man instead of “man’s ladies”. On the contrary, some words about male are positive which means strength, brave and courage like manly, masculine, virile, vigorous, peppy etc. Again, some words used to describe men in positive manner have negative opposite or different meaning when they are used for women like witch means female demon but wizard means skillful man. Governor means a leader of a province or state while governess means a woman who is paid to care for and teach a child in the child’s house.

In English language, most male words do not have fixed ending like that of female. For examples:

Male words	Female words
God	Goddess
Giant	Giantess
Prince	Princess
Author	Authoress
Actor	Actress
Host	Hostess
Steward	Stewardess etc.

It seems orderly and formal to write males names or titles before the females own. For examples: Mr and Mrs, his and her, boys and girls, men and women, prince and princess, brothers and sisters, male and female not the other way round. Again, the boys’ names are written before the girls’ names even in the class register in co-educational school where the girls’ names are even written with red biro for demarcation. If the order is reversed, they will seem non-formal.

Gender Fairness in English Language and Prospects

According to Gabriel, Gygax, and Makuhn (2018), gender fair language can be used to neutralize gender discrimination in English language. Gender fairness can be promoted to what it ought to be by doing the following.

- There are personal pronouns for each gender which are he and she. They should be used accordingly where necessary. The aim is to reduce the use of gender-specific terms.
- Gender un-marked forms of words can be used to replace masculine forms for examples:

Policeman/woman..... police officer

Chairman/woman..... chair person

Steward/stewardess.....flight attendance Headmaster/mistress..... head teacher.

This change will lead to the disappearance of the older female forms by making the previous male form unisex for example actor is now used for both male and female rather than just male actor. ‘He’ which is usually used for both male and female is now replaced with ‘he’ and ‘she’ respectively.

- Avoid using masculine form to function generically and refer to both male and female. The feminine form does not function generically but refers to women alone (Stahlberg et al (2007),
- Hellinger and Bufsman (2003)). Masculine form is used for both male and female while feminine form refers to women alone. According to Ridgeway and Correll (2004), masculine forms are used in conjunction with

traditional gender hierarchy which make men feel more powerful and higher in status than women. If this is avoided, gender fairness will be achieved. For examples: Down fall of a man is not the end of his life instead of down fall of a man/woman is not the end of his/her life or down fall of anyone is not the end of the person's life, Man must eat instead of man and woman must eat or everyone must eat etc.

- The third person pronouns should be used accordingly. When a man is meant 'he' should be used and when a woman is meant 'she' should be used. It was found out that out of 800,000 news messages published in English between 1996 and 1997 that the third person pronoun 'he' was used more frequent than 'she' (Gustafsson, Lindholm & Sikstorm, 2014). For example: No man knows tomorrow until he plans for it instead of nobody knows tomorrow until he/she plans for it.

- Words showing little respect to women should not be used for example:

Man and wife instead of man and woman/ husband and wife

Men and girls instead of men and women/ boys and girls

- Use neutral gender instead of suffixes to show the female form of words. For examples:

Female lawyer-----lawyer Female doctor-----doctor

Authoress-----author Waitress-----server god-----
-----goddess

- Positive endings can be changed into neutral and invented negative endings can be changed into correspondence with positive while the original positive endings can be changed to marked terms. For examples:

Positive endings	Negative endings	Neutral
Chairman	chairwoman	chairperson
Foreman	forewoman	supervisor
Mankind	womankind	people
Postman	postwoman	post worker

Conclusion

Education is the medium of ensuring equal rights and justice in a civilized society. This is because the best way to solve a problem is by educating the people involved. Gender inequality is rooted in the cultural practices of a society, traditions and customs. Religious practice is not exempted therefore to wipe it out in a short while is not feasible. It is a gradual process so all hands are to be on deck for success to be achieved. The female forms of words as well as the neutral forms should be used as often as the males' forms. In doing this, social development, gender fairness; social tolerance will be maintained and sustained.

Suggestion:

To implement gender fairness in English language, it has to be included in the curriculum to be studied as one of the courses in primary, secondary and tertiary institution of learning. This will serve as awareness forum to end gender inequality. Again, gender neutral words should be used as often as possible. Students can be given assignments to write down gender discrimination they observe in their environments. Their observations can be handled in the classroom, conferences, seminars, symposium etc. All these measures are to see how gender fairness can be implemented and sustained.

References

Arat, N. (2017). Feminizmin ABC'si. Say Yayinlari.

- Baharul Islam, K. M. (2018). Issues in language teaching: Gender in language education. *ResearchGate*. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/328364966>
- Clarke, K. (2011). The paradoxical approach to intimate partner violence in Finland. *Finland Journal*, 6(1), 9-19.
- Cullen, D. L. (2003). Women monitoring in academic addressing the gender gap in education. *Academic Journal*, 5(2), 125-137.
- Eivind, K. (2017). What is the benefit of gender equality? Quora. <https://www.quora.com/what-is-the-benefit-of-gender-equality>
- Gabriel, U., Gygas, P. M., & Makuhn, E. A. (2018). Neutralizing linguistic sexism: Promising but cumbersome. *21(5)*, 1011-1023.
- Gustafsson, S. M., Lindholm, T., & Sikstrom, S. (2014). Biases in news media as reflected by personal pronouns in evaluative concepts. *Social Psychology*, 45, 103-111.
- Hellinger, M., & Bußmann, H. (2003). Gender across languages: The linguistic representation of women and men. *Benjamins*.
- International Planned Parenthood Federation. (2017). Gender equality strategy and implementation plan. IPPF. <https://www.ippf.org/files>
- King James Version. (2012). The Holy Bible. Amityville.
- Logan, S., & Johnson, R. (2009). Gender differences in reading ability and attitude: Examining where these differences lie. *Journal of Research in Reading*, 32(2), 129-214.
- Murni, M. (2010). Language and gender equality in English language teaching. *ResearchGate*. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/47630437>
- Nazife, A. (2014). Gender in English teaching course books. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, Elsevier.
- Philips, D. (n.d.). Promoting gender equality in the English language classroom. Georgetown University.
- Ridgeway, C. L., & Correll, S. J. (2004). Unpacking the gender system: A theoretical perspective on gender beliefs and social relations. *Gender & Society*, 18, 510-531.

Seker, M., & Dincer, A. (2014). An analysis of gender stereotyping in English teaching course books. *Cukurova University Faculty of Education Journal*, 43(1), 90-98.

Sivasligil, P. (2006). Gender ideology in 6th, 7th, and 8th grade course books. Turkish Ministry of National Education.

Soylemez, A. S. (2011). A study on how social gender is constructed in EFL course books. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*.

Stahlberg, D., Braun, F., Irmen, L., & Sczensny, S. (2007). Representation of sexes in language and communication. Psychology Press.

Tuba, A. E. (2018). Development of gender equality and its reflective assessment. ResearchGate. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/325577067>

UNESCO. (2015). A guide for gender equality in teacher education policy and practices. UNESCO.