

A Critical Discourse Analysis of Paradigm Shift in Men Versus Women Discourses

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Abstract

This study sets out to critically examine the systems of assumptions, values and practices embedded in men versus women discourses in some Nigeria home videos to establish a paradigm shift. Class, social status and childlessness are parts of the oppressive social milieu for which women have fought against patriarchy in their discourses under the assumption that men subordinate and subjugate women through these ideologies. On the contrary, intra-female discourses are found to be replete with some of these ideologies of power and oppression. Adopting Kuhu's concept of paradigm shift and Fairclough's tripod tool of Critical Discourse Analysis, the study purposively, gathers and analyses as data, excerpts from four selected Nigerian home videos. The findings of the study include a paradigm shift in men's perception of women in relation to issues of class and social status and childlessness. Women's linguistic choices show denial of rights and privileges, a lack of understanding, respect and appreciation of a woman as a human being by her fellow women based on the ideologies of class, social status and childlessness. The men's linguistic choices show that men are coming up to a greater level of understanding and appreciation of the worth of women beyond child bearing. In addition, men advocate eradication of any tradition or attitude that oppresses, degrades, exploits or endangers women. They also lend their voices to the concerns of the housemaids, a concern that the feminists somewhat, have remained voiceless about.

Keywords: class, social status, power, Nigerian men and women discourses, paradigm shift.

1. Introduction

Popular discourses on feminism and its variants have centred on the issue of recognising women as full fledged human beings, with equal rights and

privileges as humans and as citizens in societies. These discourses have led to a social re-engineering of most of the social and cultural systems and beliefs of men that inhibit the rights, privileges and development of women. The place of the women in most societies has changed as a result of the battles of the sexes in those societies. Thus, this paper seeks to elucidate some of the fallouts of inter-gender engagements and as well, expose benighted vices in intra-female gender discourses.

2. Feminism

Feminism and its variants emerged as socio-political tools to redress the anti-social and cultural ideologies of the chauvinistic societies that stood against the rights and privileges of women. Womanism, an African variant of feminism, has beamed its light on different discourses to expose and address social and cultural ills that characterise the African societies. Through an examination of the social interactions in these societies, the feminist has been able to dissect some language use and expose the social and structural oppressions they embody. This has resulted in a reconstruction and reconsideration of women's roles, interests and concerns in many cultures and societies.

In recent times, there are obvious changes in the beliefs and attitudes of men toward women in most patriarchal societies. In most African homes, where it was a taboo for men to assist their wives in house chores especially, in the kitchen activities or even worst, to wash their wife's clothes, men do these honourably these days, especially the educated ones. This shows a huge shift from the conceptual paradigm of their forefathers who will rather give dehumanising labels to any man that assists the wife. However, at a point as this, certain concerns in intra-female discourses tend to present a greater danger to the well-being of their fellow women in these same societies. Unfortunately, most of the

researches are still over concentrating their attention on men's language use, failing to recognise and address the social and structural oppressions that exist among women through language use. The issue of marriage and social status or class has created heated arguments with respect to how men treat women in marriages, especially women without children.

Thus, language plays a very vital role in determining and defining social oppression. Language users create and define realities according to their perceived frames. These frames give them opportunity to speak and act in certain ways towards others but most times, these language behaviours are taken for granted. According to Gracia (2004), the results of such language behaviours, that may be taken for granted, "can be analysed and made explicit in the light of the scientific knowledge produced by human or social sciences". The results of such analysis can help to expose certain hidden ideologies and their attendant power relations among persons or social groups. Thus, social powers are hidden in language behaviours embedded in systems of beliefs, specific values, knowledge, experiences, thoughts, norms and the likes, among a people or social groups.

Sheila (1980) projected systems of beliefs, values and attitudes that she sees as bedrock of feminism. These systems and values portray women as those that understand their values and their worth, and as well, have a high regard for themselves against the portrayals of women in male dominated cultures. One of the challenges of the male dominated cultures she addressed has to do with the fact that the act of being a woman is equivalent to being a human and as such, women are strong, capable, intelligent and successful ethical beings, who should have autonomy as individuals or groups, to develop and run their own political, social, economic and personal destinies. She preaches that feminists reject separation of human qualities into two categories and valuing one as better than the other which is characteristic of the male dominated societies, to the detriment of women. She emphasizes that such platforms that have been used against women in many cultures, are built from false and wrong-headed ideologies that could have emanated from myth, ignorance and fear. These according to her are being replaced by realities and knowledge created by women themselves. She made positive strong declarations

in favour of the women folk as against the oppressive attitudes and beliefs of the men which are no more to be tolerated by the women.

In the same vein, Sotunsa (2008:30) went further to assert that the portrayal of "African females as a voiceless lot ... silent victims of oppression, as a result of patriarchal subjugation" has ceased to be the case. In other words, African females have thrown in their voices to counter men's voices that created the less-than human imagery of women. Additionally, to be adjudged from these scholars is that women especially, African women are free from oppressive and aggressive life styles of the male dominated cultures that constituted a bane to their development and well-being. Thus, the feminist fight for the emancipation of the female folk with their attendant rights and privileges is a winning war.

It is based on the views of Sheila (1980) and Sotunsa (2008) that this paper finds its argument relevant i.e. that most men have come to terms with an understanding of the agitations of women which Kolawole (1997) identifies thus:

"African women are products of multiple subjugation; patriarchy, traditions, colonialism, neo-colonialism, racism and gender imperialism; all combine to act against the African woman's self-assertion (1997:25)."

As contained in the data for this study, men can be seen as agents of social change with a theme that is focused on the improvement of the women's condition. The changes they advocate include eradication of any tradition or attitude that oppresses, degrades, exploits or endangers women, whereas, from the data for this study, the reverse is the case in the context of intra- female discourses. This falls in place with Amenga-Etego (2013) study portrays that in many African societies, women seem to be deceptive in the sense that within them, there exist status, class, race, ethnicity, deprivation and subjugation as well as Onwueme (1992) *Go Tell it to Women*, also laments the disunity among women stressing that they no longer fight for equality and equity but for extermination of even a fellow woman.

3. Critical Discourse Analysis/ Discourse

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is concerned with how values, knowledge, experiences and thoughts are embedded in language use and made manifest in interactions which in turn, establish power and ideology of social relationships and practices. Language is a tool that serves users in knowing, valuing, and experiencing the world. Luke, (1997) posits that critical analysis of language is indispensable for the evaluation, appraisal, and the understanding of what is unfolding in social life as reflected in texts. Hence, CDA tries to expose ideologies of power embedded in written texts and spoken words which give rise to dominance, inequality, and bias and other forms of aggressive behaviours that are maintained, reproduced, and transformed within specific contexts of social groups (Van Dijk, 1988). As a matter of fact, language use in a discourse in specific context is a subtle way of recreating and exposing realities within that context.

Foucault, (1972: 117) in explaining discourse posits that discourse is “a group of statements that belong to the same discursive formation and is made up of a limited number of statements for which a group of conditions of existence can be defined.” Thus, discourses show the reality, the actual, and the beliefs of discourse participants about their world as they have framed it in their minds. Discourse shows language user’s perception of reality with respect to a society or an individual. This then, means that the meaning of the language choices of speakers or writers resonate with social identities, systems of knowledge and belief about objects or participants of discourse situation. In other words, a participant’s linguistic choices are in accordance with his or her social frame of the other participant or the experience around the object of talk. Hence, a critical analysis or evaluation of the linguistic choices of male versus female discourses in the data, highlights a paradigm shift; a sharp contrast to most studies that have linked women’s social oppressive experiences to men’s attitude. Women’s linguistic choices in the home videos consist of unequal social relationships among women which reveal that there is no natural order of talking about women issues, rather, analysis of what is recaptured in talks in contexts determine the social structure and social order operational in women society. Hence, Foucault (2002: p54) posits that discourses

are practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak and that texts are the only evidence for the existence of discourses, ... a kind of concrete realisation of participants’ abstract forms of knowledge or beliefs about the world and situations.

4. Paradigm Shift

Paradigm shift was coined by an American philosopher Thomas Kuhn in his "The Structure of Scientific Revolutions," published in 1962. Kuhn calls it a conceptual scheme from which theories and philosophical assumptions can be drawn. In essence, his argument posits that the world or reality, cannot be described independently of the conceptual schemes through which they are observed. It is through the observable conceptual patterns that a contrast or paradigm shift occurs; and this implies some kind of change in some world views.

Kuhn’s theory of paradigm shifts was science based and his postulations were hinged on the fact that science does not progress in an even way, but rather, disciplines undergo periods of emerging crisis that requires a new approach in addition to existing paradigm which he designates as “a revised disciplinary matrix” that is meant to help to eliminate the most pressing anomalies and allow for optimal solutions to outstanding and unsolved puzzles. Paradigm shift is a concept that has been applied to different disciplines as a way of revolutionary search for a basis to account for replacements or adjustments in existing structures that have failed to solve certain important anomalies or puzzles within disciplines.

From the foregoing, one can confidently assert that one of the observable matrix in the battle of the sexes is language use. This has given rise to so many assumptions about women in the frame of men’s cognition and men in the frame of women’s cognition. In the same way, re-observing some inter-gender discourses, (from some of the Nigerian home-videos), reveals a huge contrast from the usual way of looking at the men versus women’s discourses, thereby, creating a need for a revolutionary search beyond popular feminism, that can solve the anomalies existing among women as portrayed in their discourses.

5. Methodology

This study examines four discourse excerpts from four selected Nigerian home videos to establish that there is a paradigm shift in the way men focus on the issues of marriage, childlessness and class. It will examine the language choices of women to underscore facts of women's projections of themselves in relation to rights and privileges of other women. These are analysed based on the ideologies that have dominated feminists' arguments: class, social status and childlessness. Kuhu's concept of paradigm shift and Fairclough's 1995 view of Critical Discourse Analysis as tools for the analysis. Fairclough (1995) opines that discursive relations are sites of social struggle and conflict and that every social situation is a potential domain of class/cultural hegemony, with dominant groups struggling to assert and maintain particular structuring within and between them. To him, there is no society with one dominant discourse; even within the groups that are regarded as objectively constituted within the society, more groups can be identified with a closer look at the discourses of members of the groups. Hence, the examination of the excerpts to identify discourse patterns that can account for replacements or adjustments in existing structures that may contribute to anomalies or puzzles within social groups.

6. Data Analysis

This study examines four discourse excerpts from four selected Nigerian home videos to establish that there is a paradigm shift in the way men focus on the issues of marriage, childlessness and class. It will also examine the language choices of women to underscore facts of women's projections of themselves in relation to rights and privileges of other women. These are analysed based on the ideologies that have dominated feminists' arguments.

6.1 Class, Social Status and Inequality in excerpts 1&2

1. The Maid and the Prince

In this movie, Madam Ogeorganised a party for her son that just returned from his studies abroad. The party was meant to expose him to some ladies from whom the mother would want him to choose a wife from. Of all the well-dressed ladies, he fell in love with a motherless girl that was being used by her

stepmother as a housemaid and decided to marry her. His choice of the maid was as a result of her dedication to duties in the midst of pains and injuries the stepmother inflicted on her. The mother raised objections to his proposal and starts a discussion on that with the husband thus:

Madam Oge: My husband, can you imagine your son choosing a housemaid over all the girls that came to the party! I will not accept that girl as a daughter-in-law. She is worse than a house girl.

Prince father: Ezinne is not a house girl, it is just that she is being maltreated by a woman who is supposed to protect her like a daughter. I think she is an embodiment of humility. If you don't want her as a daughter-in law, I want her

Madam Oge She deserves to be treated worse than that."

In the above exchanges, the word, "housemaid" connotes less than a woman, which in turn, disqualifies Ezinne from being a daughter-in law to madam Oge. The Prince saw her at the point of discharging her duty as a housemaid and chose her for the qualities he saw in her. Prince's father's statement, "Ezinne is not a housemaid, it is just that she is being maltreated by a woman who is supposed to protect her like a daughter" is a big slap to the women folk as it embodies the realities of the attitudes of most women towards their female folk. Women are supposed to protect their fellow women but instead, they see their sisters as deserving to be treated "worse than".... Prince's father could see value in the young woman: "an embodiment of humility" just like the son, while the mother sees something less than a woman and deserving the worst treatment.

The prince and the father could see the economic, social and cultural value Ezinne embody and are ready to give her her rightful place in the society but her fellow woman stands as a hindrance.

2. World Apart

The utterances below are made by the queen in reference to her son's female friend based on class differences between the two.

"And this is your best cloth? Let me inform you that those who associate with the prince should be well dressed and not those that dress like beggars. Who is this thing beside you? So you are very proud to invite a tortoise to dine with your father on the same table?"

You will agree with me that you don't fit in here. Go outside when we are done, the remains will be given to you. Get out!

Pick a female friend from anywhere and I will support you but not from the gutters. You went to visit the house help. What did you find in that girl, her dirty body, her dirty clothes, her unkempt hair or what?"

The term house help or housemaid has become a derogatory word used to label some class of women by other women as a result of their social and economic status. The use of the word by the queen, in conjunction with other words such as: "beggars", "this thing", "tortoise", "eat remains" (like the dog), "from the gutters", "dirty", and "unkempt", shows clearly the social frame of housemaids in the minds of the women that hire them. Such terms or labels otherwise known as name calling by the queen, are one of the major areas the feminists have fought against and frowned at men, because it ever deprives women their social status and even affect their social perception of themselves. In this case however, it is a women that appears to be the tool of the oppression of the woman

The next utterance is from the queen to the aunt of the housemaid as she comes to warn her concerning the relationship between her housemaid and the Prince,

"If I cough you will vanish. You have dragged me out, look at me, the eagle that comes out once in a year. Send that girl back to her village. Take this =N= 150,000 and tell my son the girl suddenly took ill and died. I am buying back the dignity of my family with that money"

The queen portrays here, the act of social violation some women exhibit on their fellow women as a

result of class. She sent her bodyguards to fetch the maid's aunt as she pulled over by her gate. Her fellow woman comes out of her house to meet her outside the gate on her knees in fear, and begging to explain her innocence over the relationship but was met with the terror in words as expressed above. Furthermore, the command to send the girl back to the village was a perpetual pronouncement to doom, coupled with the ill saying that she is dead.

To return the maid to perpetual life of poverty so that the dignity of the queen's family is retained will cost only #150,000. This is the worth of the girl's life in the eyes of the queen; what a tragedy in a time when the worth of women is being recognized and appreciated by men.

As the son asks the mother to know why she is against his friendship with the girl, she responds thus:

"The difference is in the way we live."

The problem of social status blindfolds the queen to her responsibility to her fellow woman.

For the reason of this response, the Prince decided to go to the village of the housemaid to pick her and her mother to the city to transform their lives through education and other social engagements to the level of the class of his mother's taste. He did this with the consent of the father who even gave him all the needed assistance. After six months, the way the maid lives changed and just as the mother had desired the daughter of a minister, the son connives with the father and announces to his mother that he has got the daughter of a minister as a female friend, and being overjoyed, she demanded he invites her home. As he brings the supposed daughter of a minister home, the following exchanges took place.

"Prince: Here comes the queen of the Prince"

Queen: You are welcome my dear. Feel free, this is your home. You are such a wonderful daughter-in-law. You are such a perfect match for my son. You are mature, humble, intelligent and beautiful – God bless you my daughter. Lucky is a mother-in-law who finds a good daughter-in law".

Here lies the bedrock of the social ills that housemaids go through which neither the feminists

nor the society has paid adequate attention to. The housemaids are treated as worthless and useless because of the label “housemaid”. Their worth are destroyed, killed and buried as implied in the queen’s utterance to the aunt of the housemaid.

The Prince saw the maid to be a wonderful, perfect match, mature, humble, intelligent and beautiful wife whereas the mother saw ‘a beggar’, this thing, “a tortoise”, “eat remains”, “from the gutters”, “dirty” and “unkempt”. This shows that women have a long way to go in dealing right with themselves especially, when it comes to class or social status.

After the maid left, the Queen continues:

“That girl is intelligent and beautiful and a good combination. I want you to start off the traditional marriage arrangements before other men will outsmart and overtake you. I can’t stand losing that girl as a daughter-in law.”

The girl she “can’t stand losing” was the girl she killed and buried with #150,000. These housemaids that are treated as rags would have been great women had it been that the right opportunities are given to them by their fellow women whom they serve.

After their marriage, when time had passed, the prince decided to show the queen what she ought to know and do that she failed to do. He rearranged the wife’s hair, removed all the make ups and she wore that old beggar’s clothe and walked into the sitting room and the prince turned to the mother thus:

Prince: Mother can you recognise that lady that is walking into the sitting room.

“Queen: (perplexed) What is happening here?”

Prince: This is the same peasant girl you threw out of this house some time ago. I transformed her and her mother with the help of my father. Life is all about equality. We should strive to make people what we want them to be. You can see beyond clothing and social status a betrayal of what you want. Spend on someone to make her what you want her to be”.

Since women have chosen to be voiceless over the sufferings, denials, relegation to second class

citizens and even less than human experiences of the housemaids, the men from the above exchanges, have decided to voice out on behalf of this group of people and that is a wakeup call to fight against the strategies of inequality among women. In other words, men are throwing in their voices for intra-female gender recognition, support, development, equity, and equality for a better society.

6.2 Childlessness in Excerpts 3&4

UNDER FIRE

This movie explicates the perception of most women about other women especially with the issue of childlessness. Odinaka falls in love with a lady and decides to marry her but his mother stands against his wish, based on the fact that the young lady’s sisters haven’t gotten children for their husbands.

“Mother-in law: What is going on here?”

Daughter-in law: Oh mama, am sorry I didn’t greet you, I was carried away by Odinaka’s presence.

Mother: What? My own son? There is no relationship between the vulture and the barber.

Odinaka: Mama please ... she is my fiancée.

Mother: I will not allow you to bring this firewood into my family and I can’t wait for you to give me my grandchildren.

Odinaka: What has she done? What is wrong with her?

Mother: You want to marry a girl whose three sisters are men and firewood in their husbands’ houses. Have you been blind folded?

Odinaka: Mama you can’t stop me. I love her. If God gives us children, okay but if He decides otherwise, so be it!

Mother: I will stop you, is she the only girl in this village?

You are stubborn; I will tell you that I carried you in my womb for ten months. After all, that girl is not a full woman, she is not a woman.

Odinaka: Mama marriage is for companionship

Mother: "tufia" marriage is for procreation. God will never let lizard grow hair.

Odinaka: African mentality..."

One of the language functions that is so prevalent, from the data for this study, is name calling. Name calling or negative labels is an act of superiority and it is used to debase and dehumanise the referent. The term "firewood" stands for an object that has no life in it, and cannot change from its present state of deadness. Hence, these childless women receive stricter judgement from the ones that have children. To Odinaka's mother, marriage must be for procreation which underscores her language choice "firewood" – a lifeless situation, for the sisters to her son's fiancé, who have not been able to have children for their husbands. To Odinaka, marriage is first for companionship, then, if children come, they are additions. This shows a shift from the natural African man's belief about marriage which is now dominant with women judging from Odinaka's mother's utterance. This goes to buttress the fact of the increase in the number of homes that go for adoption of babies these days and age, which is contrary to the original African man's belief. In other words, most African men have come to the realisation that the worth of a woman in the home and even in the society is not tied to child-bearing.

IMPATIENT MOTHER IN-LAW

"Daughter-in law: Mama good evening, mama good evening

Bernard: Mama she is greeting you.

Mother-in law: Is it not when somebody greets me that I should respond?

Daughter-in law goes inside crying.

Bernard : Don't cry please. You should know I love you. Don't mind my mother.

Daughter-in law: She hates me because I can't give you a child.

Bernard: Mama leave us alone. When it is God's time we will have our babies.

Mother-in law: Let me tell you, no matter how grown or rich you are, you are still my son and you must listen to what I am telling you. What do you have to say?

Bernard: Mama I've heard you. You know my job is hectic; I want to go and rest.

Mother-in law: Has it gone this bad? Has she so blinded you that you don't want to listen to your mother? See, that girl has to leave this house.

Bernard: why?

Mother-in law: Because she can never bear a child.

Bernard: Mama are you God?

Mother-in law: She is an ogbanje. She must go. I have become the object of joke of all the women in the village.

Bernard: Mama she is my wife.

Mother-in law: If you cannot choose a real wife, I will bring you a real woman from the village who will fill this house with children; for six years, nothing to show. That girl must go. You carried a man like yourself and kept with you. I can't stay here and watch one barren woman manipulate my son. She must go, she has to go!"

The excerpt above reveals other forms of degrading, derogatory and dehumanising language use of some women, especially, mothers-in law on the childless woman. Bernard's mother sees her daughter-in law as: "nobody", "ogbanje", "not a real wife", "a man", "barren", and "a manipulator", just for the fact that she has no child. By these qualifications, she has no worth or value to her mother-in law therefore, she must leave the son. On the other hand, the son defends the wife, not minding whether she will bear him children or not by telling the mother,

"leave us alone", "you are not God".

Most African men that leave their first wives on the basis of childlessness, they do that by yielding to pressures from their mothers. But in the case of

Odinaka, he challenges the mother's stand and rejects her proposal even with a command to leave them alone. Odinaka's response to his mother is anti-African beliefs in matters of marriage and procreation. Men have been held in contempt for sending their wives away as a result of childlessness but from this movie, it is the man that advocates that the woman should stay despite her childless state whereas the mother is the one pushing the wife away as a result of childlessness.

7. Conclusion

From the analysis of the excerpts from the four selected Nigerian movies, this study concludes that there is a paradigm shift in men versus women discourses. From the language choices of the women in the data, it is obvious that women have become much more aggressive towards each other on the same footings of social status and childlessness for which they condemned patriarchy. Women linguistic choices show denial of rights and privileges, a lack of understanding, respect and a lack appreciation of a woman as a human being by her fellow women based on the ideologies of class, social status and childlessness. The women discourses are replete with degrading, derogatory and dehumanising labels.

On the contrary, and from the exchanges of the males in the movies, the study finds out that men have come to a greater level of understanding and appreciation of the worth of women beyond child bearing, class and social status. Additionally, they are becoming more supportive towards the rights, privileges, respect, and equality of all. Hence, they uphold the values of equity and humanness from their discourses.

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