Personological Creation of Language: The Feminist Perspective

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Abstract

This research stems from Helene Cixous's call for women to invent their language – the language of feminism – by interpreting their identities as a science of feminine creation. This science is a protest of women's subjugation and exploitation using symbolic language to question male supremacy. Thus, this research investigates sexual differentiation as related to language differentiation between men and women. This investigation aims to develop standards and deploy a feminist-specific language known as *l'ecriture feminine*. Significantly, the argument seeks to challenge masculine realities, judgments and perspectives manifested in language deployment. A creative writing-based methodology is used, and the primary author is Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo, together with other relevant authors and feminist critics who have demonstrated in their works, women's patterns of reasoning and language. The goal is to create a language of feminism that is a conscious effort to erase or contrast the language of patriarchal imaginary order, which is fundamental in language codification. Consequently, female and male writers who share this position are encouraged to develop and rewrite popular narratives to establish the language of feminism as a field of exploration and use in the modern world.

Keywords: Personology, Language, Creativity, Feminism and Patriarchy

Introduction

The study of language has expanded into the field of personology which can be conceptualised as the language of persons. Person in this context refers to personality. Personality language is derived from repeated experiences of a person eliciting certain patterns in language in the same events, things or contexts. This could be "behaviours followed by pleasant outcomes [that] tend to be repeated and behaviours [sic] followed by unpleasant outcomes [that] tend to be dropped" (Funder 477). Thus, each person has a language that is distinct from others.

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It could also be the use of language concerning a group, gender, or environment. This can be found among age brackets in the descriptions and prescriptions of language types—children's or adult's language. D. McNeil posits in "The Creation of Language" that "In slightly more than two years children acquire full knowledge of the grammatical system of their native tongue. The process behind this stunning intellectual achievement is essentially one of creation" (Oldfield & Marshall, 21). Also, Richard Larson relates how it reflects in children, "…some distinctions that can be made among the kinds of written language children use, and by discussing how these kinds of writing contribute to the development of children's power to use language (3). It could be the language of a sociopath, psychopath, or programmed pattern of communication and interpretation. An example is machine language which a computer can understand first and interpret later. However, this is a non-human language.

The exploration of language according to personality is regarded by Samuel Wesley as "The dress of thought"; to Jonathan Swift, as "proper words in proper places"; to W.B. Yeats, as a "high breeding in words and argument" (Crystal 68). The effort to present feminine language by authors presents an evaluative and descriptive inscription in words—language—to reflect education, religion, and social philosophy. Through such study, language through personality specifications is recognised and interpreted to give an account of culture and histories based on sexual differentiation and stratification (Trudgill, 78). This investigation follows a similar line of argument that is nonpatriarchal and shall be explored through misogyny, gynocriticism, and Ecriture Feminine.

Misogyny

The language of feminism was conceived at the identification of the hatred/passivity towards female characters by patriarchal narratives. For in the language of femininity, there is an invocation to counter the language of misogyny which comprises male privileges against feminine standards, feminine sexual objectification, and contempt and prejudices against the female gender. And because language is a psychological weapon in social engineering, anyone or group with the power of language controls the specifications and delineation of language structure because everything is a product of language labels. Some negative labels are the language of resentment, spite, ill will, antagonism, contempt, and hostility deployed against women. Then the question is, "Who created misogynistic language?" Ezeigbo argues and implicitly states that men prescribe for women (9). This accounts for why men and women should use separate languages to avoid marginalisation. This may sound awkward but it had been practised in the West Indies before it was frustrated by Western influence:

> The classic examples of linguistic sex differentiation, well known to students of language, comes from the West Indies. It was often reported that when Europeans first arrived in the Lesser Antilles and made contact with Carib Indians who lived there, they discovered that men and women 'spoke different languages. This

> would of course have been a very startling discovery, and one that does not appear to have been paralleled anywhere else in the world. (Trudgill, 79)

Over the years, maleness has been accused of having undue privilege over femaleness through narratives that give maleness the monopoly of language structure and traumatise women into feminism. An example is the popular use of the pronoun "He" not "She" for God despite the gender of God being unknown. The example proves how male pronouns are so powerful in English tradition and other languages that they aid effective and inclusive masculine communication, consequently making male pronouns represent both genders or in the case of an unknown context. This is mostly done when referring to animals whose sex is undefined or unknown. By extension, masculine language dominance is reflected in creative characters and works. However, masculine language dominance together with the contemptuous and spiteful deployment of language against women in literary texts is revisited and rebutted by Ezeigbo in *The Last of the Strong Ones*.

In the fictional society created by Ezeigbo, the author reduces the heroic posture of maleness and the deployment of misogynistic language. She proceeds to question the phallocentric centrifugal nature of the African worldview which is deeply rooted in the heroic dimension of maleness in these societies that celebrate and propagate phallocentric disposition. In Ezeigbo's society of Uga, the female characters play major role in the affairs of the people than the men. In the execution of their duties, women reverse the elevation and celebration of misogyny in the Uga society. As a matter of necessity, twenty women are selected as representatives in the town council to preserve the tradition of the people and in the fight against Kosiri, their common enemy (3). The Umuada, the council of the first daughters, also plays a supreme role in governing and guiding the people. Members of the Oluada are carefully chosen from the four villages of Umuga to be the voice of femaleness among the sixteen inner council committees while the men play second fiddle. The recreation of the council where femaleness dominates is where the quest for change in the female narrative begins. Expectedly or quite on the contrary, in the council, feminine language is pitched against misogynistic language. The argument is that if women are in the majority within the power structure, then the language of feminism can be established as an equal language of power.

The concept of misogyny is also questioned in Ezeigbo's *Roses and Bullets* through the sexual objectification of the female characters. The author explains objectification through the medium of sexuality. For this reason, sex determines the language that is adopted in certain circles. This is done through the unconscious choices of language in social relations. Furthermore, the male pronouns became standard usage in daily phraseology. Even in sex, the female figure is not trusted as her body could be neglected or abused since she is regarded as a social/ biological factory as enshrined in day-to-day language use. Ezeigbo's *Roses and Bullets* presents a good instance of her attempt to create a language for femininity:

> This morning her favourite entertainer was a lively playful fellow who thought the entire house belonged to her. She sang loudly enough to arouse the curiosity of the whole house and even the neighborhood. She sang lustily as if warbling to a distraught lover. But how did Ginika know it was a 'she' and not a 'he'? Well, only a female could sing so sweetly and with such a clear lilting voice, she rationalised. So, the bird ought to be a female. (16)

The excerpt represents the author's attempt to change patriarchal narratives: the bird is said to be a 'she' and not a 'he' though the sex is unknown. Her reason is that the bird sings well and based on that reality, it is considered a 'she'. But how did she come about female birds singing better than their male counterparts? We all know that birds do chirrup but we do not have the insight that female birds do it better than male ones. But at the heart of the story is the author's intention to give a voice to the female bird. The bird does not only sing, it heals Ginika's wounded soul through happy songs that a male bird may not be capable of offering. The description given to the female bird likens her to a physician with the capacity for healing. This is what feminine language sets out to achieve as it is implied that the language of feminism has the temperament or the mood of a physician or psychologist.

Also, there are preconceived negative opinions of women as expressed in sexual extremism by men which is now standard practice. This masculine predilection is detrimental to femaleness and the damage to females is done to show contempt. Such prejudice against women according to Gayle Greene and Coppelia Kahn (56), is not only biological but cultural. For instance, there is the prejudice that women are not masters of emotion which is readily headlined in masculine narratives. Consequently, women are branded and treated as subordinates. Furthermore, the cultural prejudice that women are only needed for reproduction objectifies femaleness. Therefore, many phrases and narratives need to be withdrawn to engender a balanced worldview about the sexes, and to address the matter of women being the weaker sex:

> "The truly feminine woman," writes Nietzsche, "rejects, tooth and nail, every form of 'right.' The state of nature, the incessant war between the sexes, easily assures her of the supremacy." Science has confirmed the German philosopher: the weaker sex is not the one people think it is. And this is not a matter of some vague condescension but of an avalanche of new biological and demographic information. (Christen, 21)

Gender stereotypes and contempt against women need to be corrected in language use. A few of these stereotypes are carried in narratives such as men are more productive than women; maleness is a superior gender while femaleness is secondary; and men are the conventional head of the family and not women. Thus, in several writings, the referential pronoun for both genders is 'he'. The grammatical and lexical expressions encoding gender are usually male gender-marked nouns and pronouns.

In *Roses and Bullets,* women and girls are not allowed to be combatants during the war. They are rather relegated to working as cooks and doing auxiliary jobs: "'I do understand. I know she's safe here, but we want her home,' he insisted. 'We want her to train with other young women as a special constable, in Mbano'" (*Roses and Bullets* 9). The role of women is that of a special constable serving the men during the war. This can be seen in, "As soon as Ginika got home and emptied her tin of water in the huge water pot in which drinking water was stored, she went upstairs…" (186).

The language of misogyny is regarded as a language of hatred and hostility toward femaleness, and it is a language that carries an iota of intolerance as a result of feminist attacks on male gender supremacy. The essence of addressing the misogynistic language is to establish the argument that femaleness is marginalized and needs to be re-addressed through the language of femininity, submitting that men created misogynistic language and should be refuted by women.

Gynocriticism

Elaine Showalter propounded gynocriticism to establish methods of explaining women's experiences (Dobbie, 99). The movement is a contrast from the male models towards the female model. In gynocriticism, there is a deliberate quest for the language of femaleness. This language explains female experiences by providing insight into the personalities of the female gender. The language is referred to as the language of femininity. This language is strictly created from female experience. Textually, critical cases are that of Obiatu (35), Okoroji (46), the Agbaja writer, Okwara, Ozigbo, and Onyirioha in *The Last of the Strong Ones*. In the text, these male characters are worse than the female characters which reveals the "truth" that instability is not only a feature in femaleness but also in maleness.

The act of instability is between both sexists and not femaleness only. Hence, proving that the stability ascribed to masculinity is a hoax and not a reality and this can be revealed only through a feminine voice. In such a voice, the male norm can be countered and the secondary role ascribed to women can be corrected. A case study is what happens in *The Last of the Strong Ones* when the author experiments with the voices of women. Another text mirroring such exploration is Helexe Cixous' "Le Rire de la Méduse" translated by Paula Cohen as "The Laugh of the Medusa" where the female experience could be trapped in a male language system. However, femaleness can be broken off from such conventional rules by establishing feminine-inclined language. The effort of people like Cixous for femaleness to invent their language and further advised that it should be used to further their cause cannot be underrated in the quest for the language of femininity.

Thus, she proposes that:

> I shall speak about women's writing: about what it will do. Woman must write
> herself: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they
> have been driven away as violently as from their bodies-for the same reasons, by

the same law, with the same fatal goal. Woman must put herself into the text-as into the world and into history-by her own movement. The future must no longer be determined by the past. I do not deny that the effects of the past are still with us. But I refuse to strengthen them by repeating them, to confer upon them an irremovability the equivalent of destiny, to confuse the biological and the cultural. Anticipation is imperative. Since these reflections are taking shape in an area just on the point of being discovered, they necessarily bear the mark of our time-a time during which the new breaks away from the old, and, more precisely, the (feminine) new from the old (la nouvelle de l'ancien). Thus, as there are no grounds for establishing a discourse, but rather an arid millennial ground to break, what I say has at least two sides and two aims: to break up, to destroy; and to foresee the unforeseeable, to project. I write this as a woman, toward women. When I say "woman," I'm speaking of woman in her inevitable struggle against conventional man; and of a universal woman subject who must bring women to their senses. (875)

The above statement tackles and corrects the Freudian notion of penis envy which is a direct attack on femaleness to accept the "phallus" as superior since they lack it. She negates the text written by females which celebrate the place of the phallus as a wife who always tries to please her husband. What we should have in the suggested language are texts written by females denying the place of the phallus to establish its non-existence.

Androcentrism
Another area to be greatly considered in the formation of the language of feminism is the perpetual attempt to destroy a male-centered worldview. In Ezeigbo's textual exigencies, no attempt is made to protect the phallus. All attempts are to kick against the phallus. Ejimnaka, Chibuka, etc. have no phallus and they try to fill no phallus. Thus, demonstrating their oedipal detachment rather than an attachment.

Female attachment and effort to depersonalising them start with the position of Darwin and Aristotle who refer to them as lesser beings. In the Bible, Quran and other theological books women were interpreted as lesser beings full of frailties and fray. Roman Tertullian and John Chrysostom add to the argument that women are lesser beings. However, the narrative in exploring women and deploying the use of the language of femininity started precisely in the 18th century with Mary Wollstonecraft in her *Vindication of the Rights of Women*. She argues for women and the use of feminine language. Furthermore, Virginia Woolf in 1929 added credence to this argument with her publication: *A Room of One's Own*. Her narrative traces the misrepresentation of women in history because historically language is not feminine but masculine. There is hardly any notable woman recorded in the Renaissance despite the period being regarded as the revolution of humanity when language structure was greatly influenced. Then the question is: "Was the Renaissance for men alone?" Definitely "No!" Rather women were silenced. Virginia Woolf argues that if women can have a voice of their

own with adequate freedom, they can create their narrative just as men have done to the collective history of humanity. Later Elaine Showalter and others join the argument on the search for the language of feminism.

In such language formation, female characters would have to kick against the celebration of male's worldview where the world is looked upon as revolving around men. In such an argument, maleness is not only the other but does not exist. It establishes that masculinity shades femininity in language construction. The only way out of such wanton inequality is to reconstruct female narratives and deconstruct male narratives through language. This is possible because the deployment of language in the first place is not biology: "All languages have words for relations, objects, feelings, and qualities and the semantic differences between these denotata are minimal from a biological point of view" (Oldfield and Marshall, 33). This implies that the state of language today is not as biological as cultural because, without doubt, masculine politics over the years, played against femaleness in language use which has affected the definitions of femaleness. Consequently, it reveals that language can be deployed to gender the world while the language of femininity is a recent quest begging for attention.

Ecriture Feminine

The eventual arrival of a writing style that depicts the women's world is ecriture feminine. Ecriture feminine translates from French to mean "Women's Writing". The language of ecriture feminine is expected to be feminine which is suggested to be the linguistic quest of creativity for female writers. Consequently, it exudes that texts written by a female writer lacking feminine language should be recalled because they lack ecriture feminine. For ecriture feminine to be advocated is to erase male symbolic order as established by conventions in the use of language. In other words, femaleness should not be regarded as the other but "co" because both co-exist. This explains why sex is not to be the determiner of language but gender should be the determiner. The former is biology while the latter is cultural and the way to achieve this is through the reconstruction of syntax, phraseology and other linguistic apparatuses to build a world for femininity. For instance, Adam could have been the first to eat the apple, Jesus a woman, Prophet Muhammed, Buddha, etc. could be rewritten to accommodate female characters that will speak to us in the language of feminism.

Conclusion

Unlike in social differentiation where we have social stratification and ethnic-group differentiation, in sexual personological creation of language, the differentiation is strongly between the female and the male gender which has been established through the concepts of misogyny, gynocriticism and ecreture feminine. Traditionally, it has been argued that the former, male gender, already has a form of language in the accepted symbolic order in our daily conversations. The argument for the creation of an accepted female symbolic order in language structure is what this investigation has done.

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