

## Language and Gender in Selected Shona Novels

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**ABSTRACT:** The purpose of this study is to look at selected Shona novels to see how gender and power dynamics are reflected through language therein. How gender is encoded and reflected within the language of literature helps in understanding the nature and stature of women in any given society. Hence the need to see how Shona writers use this potent tool called language, whether consciously or unconsciously, to deal with issues pertaining to gender in this society. Content analysis is the approach employed for the study. The research established that language used by most writers in story narration through their characters continues to denigrate women although some of these writers are writing within an era we could call ‘a period of enlightenment’ in as far as gender issues are concerned. This is so because from a psychoanalytical point of view language betrays what lies hidden deep down within the individual’s psyche. Thus, if literature mirrors the society in which and for which it is written, then Shona society will continue to be viewed as one that pays lip service to issues of empowerment when it comes to women. The language of Shona literature therefore remains highly patriarchal and gendering, portraying men as better than women. It is therefore recommended from this research that Shona literature authors be sensitive to the manner they use language if they are to move away from the patriarchal cultural mind set. The authors should also balance the gender bias by using terms that are gender neutral in their narrations.

**Key terms:** Shona literature; language; gender; gender sensitivity; feminism.

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### I. INTRODUCTION

Just like in life situations like the family or work place, the female character in Shona novels seems to have a maze of social issues that she must navigate to be accepted as ‘the ideal woman’, for example how she talks, how she uses language, how she interacts with men among a plethora of many others. This trend seems to cut across different eras in the history of the Shona novel although some are being written in contemporary times when gender issues have become topical. Thus, this paper seeks to look at language and gender in selected Shona Novels namely *Pfumo reropa* by Patrick Chakaipa (old world novel), *Ndiko kupindana kwemazuva* by Charles Mungoshi (pre-independence/colonial era), *Mapenzi* by Ignatious Mabasa and *Makaitei* by Miidzo Mavesera (both new world/contemporary novels).

A close look at language and gender in these novels representing different eras attests to the fact that language is negatively skewed towards the female character even where the male character is at fault as well. It portrays stereotyped gender images in which men enjoy higher status than women who continue to play second fiddle in all facets of life.

### II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The question of how gender is reflected or encoded within language has been widely discussed in academic circles. As Chitau (2002: 17) writes, “researchers --- have shown that linguistic behaviour is one of the keys to understanding the nature and stature of women in given societies, ...”. Regarding the early work of structuralist linguists, such as Saussure, and post-structuralist thinkers, including Foucault, Derrida and Barthes, who have drawn upon yet critiqued and expanded the structuralist school of thought, scholars have predominantly drawn attention to the fact that “Language is a powerful super structural semiotic tool through which hegemonies, gendered or otherwise, are created and sustained” (Sabao 2013: 81). Moving outside the frame of Euro-American language studies in the field of gender and discourse, however, research on built-in sexual differentials in Bantu-languages in general and ChiShona remains scant. Only a few articles have been

published that investigate how gender and power dynamics are reflected in everyday language use and even less so in literature. This article offers an overview of some of these articles which deal with, or touch upon, this topic.

In his article 'Sexuality and Socialisation in Shona Praises and Lyrics', which is a comparative discussion of imagery, meaning and function in Shona traditional praises and modern songs by popular Shona bands regarding gender politics, Chimhundu (1995) included a section that specifically deals with language and gender and states that:

It is not enough merely to look at the meanings and messages in verse and lyrics composed in the language without looking at the relevant linguistic aspects, for the language itself must also be seen as a tool for lifelong sociological conditioning of the sexes. (p.152)

He further posits that the patriarchal set-up of Shona society, for instance, is reflected in several terms, which ascribe important societal and hierarchical positions to men:

*Baba* (father) is head of the *mhuri* (family) and *Mwari* (God) or *Musikavanhu* (Creator) is also *Baba*. Hierarchies of family and clan leaders, rulers, ancestors, and spirit mediums (*madzibaba*, *madzisekuru*, *madzishu*, *midzimu*) are invariably male (149). So are all other prominent or successful persons such as seers, healers, hunters, ironsmiths and fighters (*n'anga*, *vanachiremba*, *hombarume*, *mhizha*, *magamba*) (p.149)

Moreover, with regards to transitive verbs related to courtship (*kunyenga*, *kupfimba*, *kutsvetsva*) or marrying (*kuroora*, *kuwana*) or making love (*kuisa*), it is only the men who can perform them actively, while "females are slotted in object position" (p.149). In a similar vein, idioms and images used to describe the sex act are quite violent and reinforce the notion of men as active agent while the female is the passive object, as for instance in *kugara mbabvu* (to sit on one's ribs) and *kutyora gumbo* (to break someone's legs). According to Chimhundu, the same logic extends to slang expression, as well as references to pregnancy:

Current slang expressions coined by today's youth have even stronger or more violent images and are created in the same tradition which make the female the passive recipient or victim of the male's action, e.g. *kudhinda* (to stamp) and *kutsika mapapiro* (to pin down a chicken by stepping on its wing, i.e. when you slaughter it). Even the most euphemistic references to pregnancy, such as *kuitisa pamuviri* (to make someone fall pregnant) make the woman an object or victim of the man's action. (p.150)

Although Chimhundu reiterates the point that the inherent reflection of gender inequalities within language structure is not peculiar to ChiShona, in fact, ChiShona "is less sexist than English or French in that there are no male/female forms for, say, nouns or pronouns" (p.149), the total effect of the reflection of male power in the linguistic set up of ChiShona "is to put the male above the female, both physically as during sex and symbolically as in virtually all positions of leadership and authority" (p.150).

This asymmetrical power relation between men and women is also addressed by Mashiri (2000) in his article, 'Street Remarks, Address Right and the Urban Female: Socio-Linguistic Politics of Gender in Harare'. As the title implies, the article "explores and describes the socio-linguistic and cultural features of street remarks that take place between unacquainted people in the streets of Harare" (p.55) paying special attention to male-to-female remarks, since, on one hand, women are more vigorously subjected to them and, on the other, these verbal innuendos are "regarded as part of the organic male communicative devices" (p.60). Indeed, reminiscent of Chimhundu's findings, for Mashiri it is "the cultural gender relationship of man as subject and woman as object [that] gives the former address rights towards the latter (p.68). Chimhundu (1995:150) asserts that "In madanha (praises by women), it is the man's physical power that gives him sexual prowess. The same physical power also makes him the provider, e.g. as a successful farmer (*hurudza*), hunter (*homabarume* < *gomba*: lover + *rume*: man)" while, Mashiri (2000 :57) also notes that:

In Shona society, men are commonly stereotyped as fierce animals whose maleness is visibly imposing, for example *bhuru* (bull), *jongwe* (cock), *shumba* (lion), and so on. The macho attributes are celebrated by society through such figurative language expressions as; *Bhuru rinoonekwa nemavanga aro* (lit. A bull is seen by its scars) and *Musha haukukuridze machongwe maviri* (lit. A home cannot have two cocks crowning at the same time). There are no equivalent comparisons for women.

In contrast, as Chimhundu points out, women are "praised for their beauty, fertility, dignity, kindness, generosity, loyalty and hard work" (p.151), a trend which remains visible in modern poetry and popular love songs. This Mashiri also notes when he points out that fierceness, offensiveness and invincibility are not attributes connected to females, or femaleness, and women who espouse these characteristics are labelled manly (p. 57)

Thus, it is not surprising that women often find themselves subjected to street remarks by men and that "common commentary has to do with women's appearance" (Mashiri 2000).

One example of a street remark that Mashiri overheard bus touts shouting at a young woman crossing the street at the university, for example, is: "'Hure! Iwe Mira!' (Prostitute! You stop!)" (p.58). The usage of the abusive term *hure*, which is not in noun class 1 or 2, reserved for persons, but noun class 5, combined with the singular,

non-honorific second personal pronoun “indicate the speaker’s intention to offend or embarrass the addressee” (p.58). With regards to linguistic structure, Mashiri remarks that, “The objectification of women using noun classes 5 and 7, with the syntactic features [+big] and [+short, +fat], but never those of Class 21, with feature [+very big], is common in Shona poetry as well as in oral discourse (p.60).

According to Mashiri (2000) , the usage of the borrowed term *hure* from ‘whore’ also reveals stereotyped views about women in the city, which is related to the overall aim of street remarks: they are used “as a form of direct social control” (p.58). Thus, he states, “... a factor that relates to the ‘prostitute’ image is the historic joint attempt by the Rhodesian government and the African men to control African women and exclude them from the urban space” (p.59). Likewise, Chimhundu (1995:151) notes with regards to Shona literature that: All forms of Shona literature accord the highest status and esteem to married mothers (*madzimai*) who are contrasted with the despised prostitutes and loose women (both *mahure*, a term used very loosely in Shona), particularly in the context of the city, which writers portray as the ‘death bed of the Shona people’s morals and decency.

Likewise, Chitauro (2000:235) also notes that the image of “the good wife vs. the urban promiscuous woman” suffuses Shona literature and language. For her, this also means that the “sexual-policing role” is given to ‘proper’ Shona women. Indeed, whereas women’s sexuality is severely scrutinized and judged, as expressed in terms such as *hure*, “there is silence and/or tolerance on sexual morality when men are concerned”, which is also a clear indicator for the latter’s authority.

The overall objective of Chitauro (2000)’s study was to explore,

[...] how gender issues are reflected in reference and address forms used for the sexes, and for female and male space, as they are used in Shona discourse, in both those settings in which Shona traditions are relatively strictly adhered to as well as those in which they are not. (p.17)

Within her substantial and comprehensive work, she reiterates, and adds to, points that Chimhundu (1995) and Mashiri (2000) raise with regards to language and gender in their respective articles. In her discussion concerning the social connotations given to manhood and womanhood in Shona society, she points out that “Doing things the *chirume* [male] way, is doing them with cleverness, efficiency, strength and bravery, not the weak female way” (p.94). This asymmetrical power relation is reflected in the fact, that it is a strong insult to label a man as *mukadzi* (woman). Chitauro thus notes:

[...] being a metaphorical woman is considered a demotion for men, as it connotes subservience as well as emotional, apprehensive and weak behaviour, characteristics believed to be associated with women. Men, as a result, do not take being referred to as *mukadzi* lightly. (p.111)

On the flip side, as Mashiri has also pointed out, it is a compliment to a woman to be labelled a man, as in “*Murume chaiye* [She is a real man] (p.95). According to Chitauro, “A metaphorical male is a woman who is more-than-a-mere woman” (p.95). However, as she points out, women who “perform sexual male stereotype behaviours, such as taking people of the opposite sex as sexual objects, etc.,” are quickly labelled as prostitutes (p.95).

This imbalance in gender relationship, in which women are denoted as weak and passive, whereas men are strong, brave and play the active part, is also reflected in certain verb forms and verbal constructions. For instance, Chitauro writes with regards to marriage,

In the marriage process the man plays the ‘doer’ role while the woman is ‘done’. The man ‘marries’ (-roora), while the woman is married (-roorwa). The man is the subject of the active verb –roora while the woman is the subject of the passive verb –roorwa. The introduction of the -w- into the verb form brings in the passive element. (p.22)

Similar, with regards to maternity, Chitauro states that there are four verbs that are commonly used to describe the process of child delivery: “-zvara (give birth), -*sungunguka* (lit. be relieved), -*pona* (lit. survive) and -*batsirwa/-betserwa* (lit. be assisted/relieved)” (p.101). The verb –zvara is rarely used about humans as it is crude and explicit, yet, if it is used, it is only used in the passive form –zvarwa. The same accounts for -*batsirwa/-betserwa*, which is also a passive form, while the verbs “-*sungunguka* and -*pona* describe an action that happens on its own volition” (p.101). Thus, as Chitauro concludes: “Euphemism, neutralization or passivation, therefore, does not help the ‘weak and passive’ stereotype image (vis. the male ‘active and strong’ stereotype)” (p.101).

Finally, the same applies to the sexual act, in which, as Chimhundu has pointed out as well, the man is ‘the doer’ while the woman is ‘the done to’:

Descriptions of the sexual act also present the man ‘doing’ the woman. Some of the terminology used for sex, such as *kutsika* (lit. to crush), *kuranga* (punish/discipline) and *kuboora* (lit. to pierce) suggest aggressive punishing or discipline and dominance over the woman (p.107).

In his article, “The Sexual Politics of the Female Body in Contemporary Zimbabwean Youth Sociolects in Interpersonal Communicative Contexts,” Sabao (2013) investigates the linguistic set up of verbal structures referring to the sex act on a deeper linguistic level and he argues that:

Male interpersonal communication and group communication contexts on the sexual script within Zimbabwean youths’ sociolects make use of verbal extensions, which are highly patriarchal (largely applied and causative) and through which women are interpellated, at best, as subjects and at worst objects. (p.84)

This objectification is done, on a linguistic level, by the recurrence of the passive, which Sabao wrongly labels the applied, verbal extension *-w-*, as, for instance in the verb *kuiswa* (to be fucked), which is already sexist (*/kuisa/* to fuck/\*screw), since it “has penetrative connotations of the man as an agent with the woman projected as the object of the act” (p.84). Likewise, in the verbal construction *akaiswa* (lit. she was put) “[t]he female is depicted not an active participant in the sexual script, and the verb structure demonstrates or projects the female’s docility” (p.85). The passive marker *-w-* is repeatedly used instead of the existence of a reciprocal verbal extension *-an-*, which would depict the man and woman as equals as in *takaisana* (‘we screwed/fucked each other’) (p.85), for instance, which also uses the non-discriminatory first person subject marker *ta-* (p.87).

Another linguistic structure that further belittles and objectifies women is the usage of the object marker *-ka-* (class 12) instead of *-mu-* (class 1, reserved for humans), as in *ndakakaisa* (I fucked/ \*screwed it) (85) and *ndakakapinzwa* (‘I penetrated \*it/her) in which the second *-ka-* “is a Class 12 object marker which defines littleness and powerlessness” (p.86).

The verbal constructions used by women to describe the sexual act, such as *ndakaiswa* (I was put/fucked) or *akandiisa* (he put/fucked me), illustrate that “there is evidence of the embracing of the ‘otheringness’ by the females which shows the extent to which gender inequality is ingrained in various societal institutions including the vehicle of communication itself, language” (p.85). In fact, Sabao, like Chitauro, mentions that women who challenge the patriarchal set-up of Shona society are ostracized by quickly being labeled “*nzenza* (whore), *jeti* (borrowed from jet), *hure*, *pfambi*... (p.86).

In addition, he also provides a number of examples that describe sex as a painful act and underscore the passivity, surrender and submission of the female, i.e. *akaboowa* (she was bored/perforated), *akatsemurwa* (she was cut open), *akaridzwa* (she was hit), *akatsikwa* (she was trampled on), *akarohwa nyoro* (she was hit with a wet one), *akainyikwa* (she was immersed with it), *akabviriswa* (she was burnt/made to burn), *akapiswa* (she was burnt/made to burn), *akabayiwa* (she was pricked) (p.86).

As Sabao points out, the same discriminatory tendency can be found in code switching and lexical borrowing as well. The examples he provides are *akasexwa* (she was fucked/\*sexed), *akascrewa* (he screwed), and *akabhaudiwa* (she was baud/\*screwed)

Like Sabao, Mate is also interested in youth sociolects. Although her article, “Youth Lyrics, Street Language and the Politics of Age: Contextualising the Youth Question in the Third Chimurenga in Zimbabwe” does not deal with language and gender *per se*, but rather looks more broadly at the socio-political dimensions of the use of vernacular language, or street language, by youth, it does touch upon some related issues.

Like Mashiri, Mate notes that the usage of terms that are not in noun class 1 to refer to people has an objectifying and dehumanizing aspect. However, she explains it in more detail:

If a person is considered an idiot, mentally ill, a thief, prostitute or disabled, class 1 and 2 noun classifications are no longer applicable. Instead other classifications and their prefixes apply, which are all widely seen as dehumanizing and fall outside the socially and morally acceptable. The prefixes this involves are used by Street Shona in ways that are understood to demean men and women, removing them from inherent class 1 and 2 respectability. (p.114)

The example she cites as proof to this point is the term “*zimhamha*” which is the title of a song by the notorious rapper Maskiri:

Referring to a ‘sugar mama’, Maskiri uses the noun prefix *zi-* with the word *mhamha* (an informal reference to ‘mother’, and a classificatory reference to older women): this *zi-* prefix suggests someone grotesque in behavior, body shape, or otherwise extreme, excessive, deviant or out of place and/or unusual. Thus, the *zi-* prefix shows the older woman in a less favorable light, no longer accorded class 1 respectability as *amai*.

Hence, using a different noun class to refer to a person, most commonly noun classes 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12 and 21 (cf. Mashiri, Chitauro) has often a demeaning and/or objectifying effect. It is interesting to note that Mashiri states that noun class 21 can never be used for women, which Maskiri, who raps in slang, clearly does by coining the term “*zimhamha*”. This suggests a new trend in youth sociolects. In her discussion about the Shona noun, for instance, Chitauro states,

Class 7 is a class of ‘things’, so if a human stem is prefixed by a ‘thing’ prefix to form a human noun the result is denigration of the human – the *chi-* in this example, gives meanings such as, e.g. ugly, short, or negative personality traits (depending on the discourse, the *chi-* may also be inverted to an endearment). (p.24)

This trend is also visible in street terms for young women, which according to Mate:

... may also be a form of objectification. However, when considered together with names for men, they are categories which speak to emerging subjectivities, punctuated by consumerism and related sexualities” (p.124). Examples that she cites are *kosi*, *chimoko*, *jimbisi* (whore), *gero* (girl), *bhebi*, and *chi-danger*, which “means, literally, a small dangerous escapade/something that gets you into trouble (p.124).

While some of the terms are borrowed from English, neither the origin nor the meaning of *chimoko* and *kosi* are easily discernible. On the other side, common street terms for men are, for instance, *mhene* (men with disposable income), *machinda* (lads), *ma-face* (friends), *boys*, *mabhanditi* (bandits) and *madhara*. The last term - *madhara* – describes, according to Mate:

“men [...] given to excess, (sexual) exploitation and hypocrisy, often cheating on their wives and children. They are scorned for what is seen as unfairly amassed wealth, but also envied for what their wealth enables them to do. They are attractive patrons, much like Mbembe’s postcolonial ‘potentate’” (p.116). Men who aspire to live like *madhara* but do not have the actual means are oftentimes referred to as *kamudhara*, the diminutive *-ka* indicating their lack of power and social insignificance (p.116).

In her short article on Harare Shona slang, Mawadza draws attention to the fact that the term *madhara* comes from “*mudhara* ‘lit. old men’” (p.96). According to her, this term is used often for male motorists parking their cars. Thus, for her “the concept behind the usage of the term originates from the traditional notion that *mudhara* ‘old man’ works and fends for his family. In Shona slang, the concept of *mudhara* performs the same function because the motorist patron looks after boys who take care of his car by giving them tips and is, therefore, in the same category as the head of the family who fends for his children (p.96). Hence, some terms, such as *madhara*, indicate that Shona street slang, or youth sociolect, perpetuates patriarchal power structures, especially since most terms for men are elevating in status such as *madhara* and *biggaz*, or at least indicate mutual respect, such as *maface* or *machinda*, Mawadza notes that no equivalents or even a single term regarding women were noted in the street terms of reference. (p.95).

The reviewed literature has shown that language is not neutral in terms of gender. It is these gender dynamics that the researchers seek to explore in the analysis that follows.

### III. ANALYSIS

#### 1. Use of Verbs and Verbal Extensions

The verbs are used in a manner that objectifies women. The general trend in the novels is that in most cases where critical decisions should be made such as courtship, marriage, sex, reproductive health, the woman is a passive recipient. The use of the passive extension *-w/-ew/-iw-* which denotes passivity is indicative of this. Bunny says of his landlady’s maid:

*Kakutaura achiyema kani kunge zvinonzi ari kunyengwa.* (Mapenzi-p.69)

(Her manner of speaking o/childishly as if she is being courted.)

Even if a girl has feelings for a boy (as is the case with the maid), she has to wait to be courted and if not there is nothing she can do. Hence the African proverb, ‘*The hen knows that dawn has come, but it watches the mouth of the rooster*’, (Bukonya in Kaschula 2001:33). Even if she knows what she wants and what to say, she has to wait for the man to act or say something, being the natural speaker for the species a position society has bestowed on him.

When it comes to marriage too, the woman does not marry, but she is married. This is clearly reflected in the language the authors use.

*Nyaya yataitya tese yaive yekuchembera wozoshaya anokuroora. Saka kuzoorowa kwandakaitwawo, kwete kuroorwa futi, asi kuti kubika mapoto kwandiri kuita uku kwakanga kuchimbove tarisiro yekuti munhu acharoorwawo.* (Mapenzi-p.101)

(We were all scared of becoming old maids then fail to get someone to marry you. So now I am living with him, not married in the hope that he will marry me one day.)

*"Iwe, handina kumbokuti ita nhumbu ini. Ndaisada zvekuroora, nanhasi handidi zvekuroora, saka usandinyaudze nenyaya iyoyo. "Kuchenama kwacho kunenge kwemunhu ane ngozi.* (Mapenzi-p.101)

(I never told you to fall pregnant. I did not want to marry you and I still don’t want to marry you so don’t bother me with that issue.” He is rude like a possessed man.)

‘*Anokuroora*’ (someone to marry you) clearly shows the girl is not the one who marries but is married as earlier indicated. Though that someone is a man, he does not have a label hence in desperation the woman might fall for a bad apple like maiTanya does and live a life of regret under very abusive conditions. The passive in *kuroorwa* shows that the woman has to wait she cannot act, she is at the mercy of the man who has all the freedom of choice because he is the actor, as shown by Barnabas in his declarations ‘*ndaisada zvekuroora*’ (I didn’t want to marry) and ‘*handidi zvekuroora*’ (I still don’t want to marry). The decision is his and his alone.

Unlike his female counterpart, he does not have any pressure at all reflecting the unequal if not unfair treatment of the sexes due cultural practices.

The woman is thus at the receiving end as she is continually violated. The woman is given, 'anopiwa' sexually transmitted disease:

*Chokwadi here asikana, mukore uno nemamiriro awo munhu ungapewo mukadzi wako chirwere chenjovhera?*(Mapenzi-p.100)

(How can anyone, with the way things are nowadays, give his wife an STI?)

The woman 'anorarwa' (lit-is slept on) during the sexual act that is even when she consents:

*Saka ini ndini ndakaita benzika ndakabvuma kurarwa nemunhu ane mukadzi wake?* ( Mapenzi-p.48)

(So I was the foolish one agreeing to have sex with a married man?)

*"Usazobvuma kurarwa nemudhara iyeyu nekuti kana ukabvuma achangokusiya kana apedzerana newe."* (Mapenzi-p.107)

(“Don't agree to have sex with that old man because he will simply leave you once he gets what he wants.”)

The woman 'anorhepwa' (is raped) if she does not consent. The man forces himself upon her as is the case with Magi and maiTanya in Mapenzi:

*Mangwiwo raped me ---. Inga wani vamwe vanozotaura nyaya dzokurhepwa papera makore. Regai ndimbonotaura naKundai.* (p.51).

Barnabas also forces himself on maiTanya (marital rape) as a form of punishment for crying when he brings a prostitute home and has sex with her in the former's presence:

*---akandibvarurira hembe dzangu ndokundimanikidza achiti ndizvo zvandaichemera, saka akanga ondipawo mugove wangu.* (p.101).

(---he tore off my clothes and forced himself on me saying that was what I was crying for, therefore, he was giving me my share then.)

The applied extension is also used to show the woman in a disadvantaged position in terms of power. She is the one who waits for the man to propose, 'anomirira' (p.48) like Magi does until the right man comes. Another example of uneven power relations is clear in the scene where Eddie has sex with Saru in the toilet, she is the one who bends over 'anokotamira' (p.54) so that Eddie can enjoy. In both cases the man has an upper hand, as the applied rules out any possibility of equitable interaction as the man is already at an advantage, he is the one for whom things are done.

In cases where the woman is the subject, the causative and applied extensions are used to present the bad side of the woman; she does or causes something bad to happen. In the section Wadzanai, in *Ndiko Kupindana Kwamazuva* this is what the gossip women say regarding Magi:

*'Ko, iye mukadzi uya akanga adyisawo Rex akazoendanepizve?'*

(Tell me, where did that woman who had poisoned Rex go?)

The use of the causative extension in 'adyisawo' (had poisoned) actually exonerates Rex from guilt or blame in spite of his wayward and irresponsible behavior. The blame thus falls squarely on Magi who by implication poisoned him with love potions which resulted in his behaving badly. So, Rex becomes the victim and Magi the culprit. Furthermore, use of the enclitic *-wo* after the extended verb, reinforces the sympathy being called for in favour of Rex, who is presented as having had no choice faced with the evil Magi. This is a clear indication of society's way of protecting and buoying the male ego through beliefs and customs when it falters, (Simone de Beauvoir 1986, Dworkin 1981).

The same negative image is also clear in the following utterance:

*'Ndiye yeka. Ndiye akavaperekedza pamuchato wavo, pedze otorera shamwari murume zvakare.'* (p.154).

(She is the very one. She was part of the bridal team at their wedding, but later took away the husband from her friend.)

The applied extension in 'otorera' is used in the same way as the causative above, the woman is doing something bad, taking a friend's husband something that society does not condone. Here are two consenting adults who have had an adulterous affair that ends badly, and then suddenly the man is viewed as someone who was taken against his will?

## 2. Use of verbs in the imperative mood and Pronouns

Another linguistic dimension that shows how skewed gender relations are comes from how verbs in the imperative mood are used in conversations. The imperative is used mostly for commands and instructions. The men tend to use these in most cases as they tend to command and disrespect woman further confirming their authority and dominance over women. In the following example from *Ndiko Kupindana Kwamazuva*, though Rindai is very respectful of Rex, but the later commands her like a small child:

*'Ndokubikirai sadza here?'*---

*'Ndipe nyama chete.'*---

*'Yapera here?'*

'Ndasiya yamunozodya pabhurakufesi.'

'**Ndipe** kunotione.'

(Can I cook some sadza for you?

Give me the meat only. ---Is it finished?

I have left some for your breakfast

Give it to me let's see.)

The same happens in Pfumore Ropa (p.8) where Shizha commands Munhamo to sleep when he himself is also restless and cannot sleep:

Munhamo: **Imi mukai mava kurotomoka**

(You [honorific] wake up you are talking loudly in your sleep)

Shizha: **Ko iwe uchiri kuitei? Chivata.**

(What about you [non-honorific], what are you still doing? You sleep.)

While the wife uses the honorific you as a way of engaging the husband into conversation and intimacy the husband uses you in a disrespectful manner as if addressing or dismissing a child. Use of the imperative in '**chivata**' (you sleep), is an expression of authority/power over her and it shuts out any further avenues for conversation. Even the way the pronouns '**imi**' (you-honorific) and '**iwe**' (you-non-honorific) are used in the same conversation also shows how gender relations in terms of power are heavily imbedded in language. The woman is the one who uses the honorific pronoun '**imi**' (you) while the man uses the noun honorific pronoun '**iwe**' (you). Through language used in the above conversations we can see differences in male female conversation as an expression of power relations. This goes on to confirm Deborah Tannen's argument that men are more likely to use language to maintain status, establish control, attract attention, solve problems and exhibit knowledge whereas women use it to establish connection, give support, and reach consensus (Rhode 1997). Once the avenue for cooperative interaction is shut, the woman is automatically disarmed which impacts negatively on her self-esteem. Using language in this manner is what Eckert and McConell-Ginet (2007) in Arimbi and Kwary (2016: 169) call "gendered positioning" a positioning that makes "women disempowered by being constrained to use 'powerless' language, ways of speaking that simply are not effective in getting others to think or do what the speakers want them to". Thus, language becomes a medium of oppression used by men to force women in their place without giving them an opportunity to stand their own ground. This Lakoff (1973:45) clearly spells out when by pointing out that not only do ways men and women speak reflect the gender gap between the two, but also produces social orders in which socially men are placed higher than women:

The marginality and powerlessness of women is reflected in both the ways women are expected to speak, and the ways women are spoken of. In appropriate women's speech, strong expression of feeling is avoided, expression of uncertainty is favoured, and means of expression in regard to subject-matter deemed 'trivial' to the 'real' world are elaborated. Speech about women implies an object, whose sexual nature requires euphemism, and whose social roles are derivative and dependent in relation to men. The personal identity of women thus is linguistically submerged, the language works against treatment of women, as serious persons with individual views" (cited in Arimbi and Kwary 2016:169).

This is the case with Rindai in *Ndiko Kupindan Kwamazuva* and Munhamo in *Pfumo reRopa* cited above respectively. We also see the same trend in *Mapenzi* when Vincent dismisses Joy from his lodgings in spite of the fact that she had taken very good care of him when he was not well and in *Makaitei* when Chenjerai does not appreciate that his wife Chenai is under a lot of pressure taking care of the family all caused by his wayward behaviour.

What comes out clearly from the above analysis of the various language scenarios is that, in Shona novels women continue to be treated as minors if not second class citizens when compared to men. They are ranked second in the social order resulting in their exclusion from powerful positions and authority (Arimbi and Kwary 2016).

### 3 Ideophones

This same idea of women as objects is also expressed through use of the ideophones as is the case with 'gwibhidhi'. The ideophone means to dump as in throwing away some useless object. In the novels where it appears it is used regarding women who men have abused and dumped as the following examples from *Ndiko Kupindana Kwamazuva* show:

'Iye mukadzi waRekisika uyu, amuna woye! Chingo akanzi **gwibhidhi** kwakadaro sebadza rava nengura pamushapo,---' (p.9)

(It's Rex's wife, people! It's been long ever since she has been dumped like a rusty hoe at that home, ---)

'Haazopedzi akuti kwakadaro **gwibhidhi** zvandakaitwa nababa vako, oda zvake mumwe?' p.17

(Won't he end up dumping you like what your father did to me and fall for someone else?)

Most women across the novels are used and dumped confirming the dominance of men over women and the continued objectification of the later. This is the case with Rindai, her mother and Magi in *Ndiko Kupindana*

*Kwamazuva*, Magi, Kundai, Joy and maiTanya in *Mapenzi* and the likes of Munhamo in *Pfumo reRopa*. People dump things they no longer find useful, and women are therefore viewed as such, objects which when are past their usefulness can be thrown away like rusty hoes, old worn out clothes, in fact rubbish.

#### 4 Nouns and gendered terms

There is also a vast difference in the way terms are used with reference to men and women. Society tends to protect and easily forgive men who fall from grace as opposed to their female counterparts. Despite all his waywardness and making others suffer, in *Ndiko Kupindana Kwamazuva*, Rex gets a lot of sympathy from society at large:

'I-i, *mwana* azoshumaira iyeye---.'(p.155).

(I-i, the child spoke earnestly---.)

The use of 'mwana'(child) (cl 1) to refer to an adult who is mature, married and has had four children among other things wipes away all the bad things he has done. A child is a symbol of innocence, and Rex is presented in that dimension. Also, noun class 1 is for human beings and by using a noun from that class to refer to Rex implies that he is only human and therefore can err. On the other hand, Magi with whom he has been behaving badly, is not treated in the same way. 'Pfambi'(prostitute) (cl 9) is used regarding her. Apart from a few nouns to do with relationships most nouns in this class refer to animals (mhuka), birds (shiri) and bad mannered people e.g. 'mbavha' (thief). Referring to her by a noun from this class puts her in the animal world or category of bad things showing that something is terribly wrong with her unlike Rex who only 'errs'. Thus, nomenclature used to refer to women in the novels also shows the negative perception that society itself has of them, what Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003:3) call "semantic derogation and sexualization". In *Mapenzi* for example, the following terms, 'garinya' (cl 5- wicked prostitute), 'magarinya' (cl 6- wicked prostitutes), 'hure' (cl 5 –prostitute) and 'zigarinya' (cl 21-huge wicked prostitute) all with negative connotations are used for women while the men they prostitute with remain clean without any negative labels. In fact men who do bad things like drug trafficking, as is the case with Vincent are actually viewed with admiration, hence Vincent is called 'mukomana' (cl 1 boy), not in the ordinary sense of boy but as in a slangish manner of a highly regarded dealer. What is implied by these terms is that they are not only linguistic items but also a product of social and cultural practices through which reality is perceived by the society from which they are created and used. (Arimbi and Kwary 2016). The result being placement of men and women in a hierarchy where men are superior, powerful and 'clean' while women are inferior, powerless and 'bad'.

In Mavesera's *Makaitei?* use of nouns by Takaendesa regarding the birth of male and female children also reflects certain attitudes engrained in language regarding gender:

"*Ndakanga ndati ndazarurirwawozve naSamatenga, tange zigomana, tevere zigomana puvu, chisikana, zigomana, zigomana, ndikati aiwa rudzi rwakura*" (p.6)

(I thought the Almighty had showered me with blessings, first it was a big boy followed by another big boy), then a little girl, another big boy, big boy again and I said the clan has grown.)

For birth of boys the augmentative prefix /zi-/of class 21 is used to show that something appreciable, of quality and highly valued has been born. In this context /zi-/is used in a favorable manner as opposed to the demeaning way /chi-/ of noun class 12 is used when a girl is born where Takaendesa switches to use of the diminutive prefix /chi-/ implying that something of lesser value has come.

Even though women have certain skills, these tend not to be acknowledged through certain terminology as is the case with men. This we see in *Pfumo reRopa* where Shizha is addressed as 'vahombarume' (great hunter) p.4, yet women in the novel have special skills too but there no is terminology for acknowledgement of these.

In *Mapenzi*, the husband continues to be addressed as "sekuru Sabha" (uncle Sabha), while the wife is always addressed as mai Tanya (mother of Tanya). This manner of address tends to liberate Sabha to behave as a free somebody while the wife should be continuously reminded that she is now somebody's mother hence she should act and behave responsibly. We do not even get to know her name throughout the novel confirming Morgan 1977's assertion that 'The very semantics of language reflects women's condition. We do not even have our own names but bear that of the father until we exchange it for that of the husband'. This is the case with Sabha's wife, the author does not even bother to give us her first name, maybe if she had not died in the story and had become old the author would still have addressed her as grandmother of so and so as is the case in the patriarchal Shona society.

## IV. CONCLUSION

The above analysis has shown that Shona novels reflect gender and power dynamics through the manner authors use language, through their characters. Women continue to be subjugated under men's domination even though the feminist movement has been going on for years and gender issues have become topical the world over. This in turn reflects on the nature and stature of women in society. The research also established that language used by most writers in story narration through their characters continues to denigrate

women although some of these writers are writing in an era of enlightenment in as far as gender issues are concerned. This reflects what lies hidden deep down within the writer's psyche. Thus, if literature mirrors the society in which and for which it is written, then Shona society will continue to be viewed as one that pays lip service to issues of empowerment when it comes to women. It is therefore recommended from this research that Shona literature authors be sensitive to the manner they use language if they are to move away from the patriarchal cultural mind set. The authors should balance the gender bias by using terms that are gender neutral in their narrations.

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