

## **Sexist Language in Nigerian Newspapers: A Case Study of *ThePunch* and *the Guardian* Newspapers**

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**Abstract:** *This research was informed by the Whorfian view that language exerts a great influence on worldview and attitudes. The work was based on Claude Shannon's Communication Theory. The study examined the forms, shades and manifestations of sexist language in two popular Nigerian newspapers. It established that sexism in language is a bias, not only against women, but also against men. Expressions like, men of the underworld, gunmen, for which there are no female equivalents in the language lend credence to this assertion. A total of 206 articles, cutting across editorials, opinion pages, news reports, interviews and political columns were critically reviewed. The newspapers selected were from the September and October 2011 editions and the June 2012 of the two newspapers. The data used in this research work were collected from the articles covered in the two newspapers. This was done through a thorough examination of the data. The example words from the newspapers were first isolated and then analysed against the background of the type of sexist language they represented. Statistical tables and charts were used, where relevant to represent the data. The study revealed that 'generic masculine words' were the most commonly used sexist form in Nigerian newspapers.*

**Keywords:** *Claude Shannon, gender neutrality, language and gender, sexism, Whorf*

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### **I. Introduction**

Language is an indispensable tool for expressing feelings, attitudes and dispositions. (Gonzalez, 2012). Language can be used to establish relationships or solidarity, even as it can also be used to tear down and sever long-term relationships (Morgan, 1996). It is, therefore, the duty of a linguist to champion the phatic function of language. This point is better appreciated if one considers the words of Teri and Gamble (2002:17 [1]) that "in building relationships, we cannot be overly concerned with ourselves but must consider the needs and wants of others, since it is through effective interpersonal, small group, public media and computer-based systems that our basic physical and social needs are met".

Sexist language, which involves using expressions that denigrate or belittle a particular gender now occupies the front burner in linguistics debates, and according to Sunderland (2000: 223 [2]), "the issue of gender and language has continued to apace in a cross-disciplinary way, such that it is becoming increasingly difficult for authors to be gender blind". Avoiding sexist language reveals that we are abreast with the linguistic reform in the area of de-gendering the English Language, just as it also reveals that we respect the feelings of our readers or listeners. This is important because sexist language is being increasingly regarded as a deviation from the acceptable norm in writing. For example, in 1975, the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), in the United States approved a set of guidelines for non-sexist use of language in the Council's publications (Nilsen, Bosinajian, Gershuny & Stanley, 1977:143-159). In December 1997, the Linguistic Society of America (LSA) published a set of guidelines for non-sexist language practices to be adopted when preparing oral and written presentations in linguistics. Earlier, this year (2013), the State of Washington in the United States signed a bill into law banning sexist language forms like "freshman" and "fisherman". In the US, Washington is the fourth state to officially remove gender-biased language from the law. Others are Florida, North Carolina and Illinois. Nine other states are considering similar gender-neutral laws. The rationale behind this, according to the lawmakers is because words matter and they are important in changing hearts and minds. (*Toronto Sun* 22nd April, 2013).

The increasing acceptability of gender-neutral language is further buttressed by the fact that The American Psychological Association (APA) has published a handbook containing guidelines on how to avoid sexist language. The Association advises against what it refers to as "needless and unintended offence". These changes, are however, novel to most Nigerian writers and speakers of the English Language, as those adopting the norm are popularly seen as bad speakers or 'murderers' of the language. Informed Nigerian speakers who are aware of this reform are, therefore, left between 'the devil of using sexist language and becoming accepted or viewed as good speakers, and the deep blue sea of using gender-neutral language and being considered incompetent in the language'. For instance, an informed speaker may want to say:

Ex. 1. The Director of a company should know that they are saddled with the responsibility of...

which is non-sexist but may be forced to use the sexist form;

Ex. 2. The Director of a company should know that heis saddled with the responsibility of... , owing to the fact that the speaker knows full well that the vast majority of the listeners will see the first expression as bad English. As a result, even those who are conversant with the development are often cautious, since they do not want to be labelled as bad speakers of the language. For these ones, pleasing the majority is more important, as the saying goes that it is folly to be wise where ignorance is celebrated. They, therefore, 'speak safe', so to speak by using the obsolete but commonly used sexist forms. This problem is further compounded because most of those considered as arbiters of the language like linguists, English Language teachers, broadcasters, writers and journalists also use sexist language, either deliberately or unintentionally. According to Nair, (2003:1[3]) "We are constantly bombarded by gender-biased images in the media and give little thought to the way women and men are represented". This, according to the writer, contributes to the way in which we see our roles in society. It is a role designed for us by the language we speak, hear and read.

As reported by Holmes (2008), there is evidence that in countries such as the United States, Britain and New Zealand, newspapers, magazines, journals and books are increasingly becoming aware of attitudes to the use of the generic he and man, as in:

Ex. 3. Man is a political animal.

Ex. 4. Man proposes, God disposes.

Ex. 5. A man who does not believe in the existence of God is a fool, and writers use varieties of strategies to avoid the terms. The same can, however, not be said of writers, journalists and broadcasters in Nigeria. This paper, therefore, examines the use of sexist language by news editors, reporters, journalists, columnists and political analysts in two popular Nigerian newspapers – *The Guardian* and *The Punch* newspapers – with a view to looking at the recurrent sexist language patterns and proffering alternatives to sexist expressions. The choice of the media, and specifically, the print media, is informed by the fact that the media are invaluable tools in shaping, aggregating and influencing popular opinion. A success in getting rid of sexist language in the media will be a great one in doing so in the Nigerian community at large.

### **1.1 *The Guardian and The Punch Newspapers***

Our choice newspapers: *The Guardian* and *The Punch* are the two most popular Nigerian newspapers ([www.onlinenewspapers.com](http://www.onlinenewspapers.com), [www.allyoucanread.com](http://www.allyoucanread.com)). The choice of the two out of the numerous Nigerian newspapers is motivated by the fact that the two dailies are household names in the Nigerian print media and occupy an enviable position among dailies and tabloids in Nigeria. *The Punch* and *The Guardian* newspapers have consistently maintained their unwavering commitment to excellent journalism, both at home and abroad. They pride themselves as two of the few Nigerian newspapers that almost every Nigerian relies on for quality and reliable news.

*The Guardian Newspaper* is one of the oldest and perhaps the best of all the Nigerian newspapers. It was founded by Chief Alex UruemuIbru. He founded the newspaper in 1983 with a mission to make it one of the five best English Language newspapers in the world. It soon established itself and has since remained the flagship of the Nigerian press. Its slogan is "Conscience, Nurtured by Truth". *The Guardian Newspaper Nigeria*, has a good reputation for its quality and objective news report. The newspaper, in Nigeria, is known for its integrity in providing conservative news to the Nigerian public. It now has a nice website built with various sections ranging from News, Politics, Campus Life, Money Watch, Business, etc. (This Day Live 11th November, 2011).

*The Punch Newspaper* is owned by Punch Nigeria Limited. The newspaper was founded in 1971 by two friends, James Aboderin, an accountant and Sam Amuka, a columnist and editor at the Daily Times. Sam Amuka became the first editor of *The Sunday Punch* (Adigun, 1990). Its vision is to promote and uphold the values of democracy and free enterprise through quality news dissemination. *The Punch* is perhaps the largest daily newspaper with highest circulation in Nigeria. The newspaper covers both local and international news. It prides itself as "the Most Widely Read Newspaper in Nigeria". The online representation of the paper has undergone remarkable improvement. It is well organized into easy-to-navigate sections. It is certainly a great source of Nigerian news.

### **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

One of the latest attempts at redefining and restructuring language is that of "de-sexing or de-gendering language" (Sunderland, 2000:203-223 [4]). It is an effort targeted at making language gender neutral or gender inclusive. Almost all languages (though to a varying degree) are guilty of gender bias, with the English Language coming tops among the languages which could be described as the most guilty perpetrators of sexism in language, since the language seems to showcase every trace of sexism. Such bias has succeeded in creating "stereotypes of both male and female genders" (Holmes, 2008:317). Contrary to what readily comes to mind each time the issue of sexist language is mentioned, the English Language is also biased against the male

gender, hence the need and advocacy for gender-neutral equivalent of stereotypes. The expressions “gunmen” and “men of the underworld” are just two of such bias against men. Even when the evil associated with such expressions is perpetrated by women, the perpetrators would still be referred to not as *women of the underworld* or *gunwomen* but men of the underworld or gunmen, as the former would sound odd and unconventional.

Since language has a great deal of influence on the way we think and view the world, such expressions imprint on our mind that only men are criminals, even when some women could be more dastardly. Another example which could also be cited to buttress the fact that no gender benefits from sexist language is the word, mastermind, which though etymologically and semantically does not always connote something negative, is used more often in referring to crime, criminal activities and other forms of anti-social behaviour. Again, this word is usually associated with the male, probably owing to its root, *master*. The examples above are cited not to counteract the argument by feminists but to show that sexist language does not favour any gender. It is an evil wind that blows no one good. This is why this research aims at looking at the use of sexist language in two popular Nigerian dailies with a view to sensitizing writers and the reading public on the need to avoid gender bias in language.

### 1.3 Solutions to Sexism in Language

Various studies (Cheshire 1985; Cameron 1985, and Yusuf 1991) have made meaningful contributions towards ‘de-sexing or de-gendering’ the English Language. For instance, it has been suggested that the generic masculine be replaced with he or she, him or her, and the like, which expressly indicate that women are included in the antecedent of the pronouns as in:

Ex.5. Every good citizen should love his or her country more than himself or herself; he or she should be ready to die for it if the need arises.

This proposal was acceptable and even popular until it was considered sexist still. The assumption here is that even though the feminine gender is not eclipsed, the word order still makes the male the norm and the women the other by placing it second. One would also notice that it is cumbersome and circumlocutory (Holmes, 2008). Two suggestions have been made to resolve this snag. The first is that the singular *they* and its variants be used with singular meaning in place of the gender specific pronouns he/she. The above quoted sentence would thus be:

Ex.6. Every good citizen should love their country more than themselves; they should be ready to die for it if the need arises.

Though this has solved the problem of man-oriented pronouns and is now gaining popularity even in formal speech and writing, it has also succeeded in creating another problem in number concord, as the pronoun, *they* and its forms do not agree in number with their antecedent in this proposed usage (Holmes, 2008). This explains why some hard-core traditional grammarians find its usage ungrammatical or even offensive. This could however, be waved aside if one considers the fact that language is dynamic and that language is also a product of conventionality and so, if the language users agree on its usage, it will eventually gain currency and become the norm or standard form.

Another suggestion which seems to be gaining more currency is that which suggests that one should not assume that the male should always come first. This school of thought advocates the alternation and juxtaposition of she and he, hers and his, wives and husbands, instead of the normative he and she, his and hers, husbands and wives and so on. This removes the secondary status assigned to women in English word order. The example above will therefore be,

Ex. 7. Every good citizen should love her or his country more than himself or herself; she or he should be ready to die for it if the need arises.

It has also been suggested that the feminine *she or her* be used in place of *she or he* without any reference to the male. This usage proposes the feminine pronouns as cover or generic term for the feminine and masculine genders (Yusuf, 1999). This would generate the sentence above as:

Ex. 8. Every good citizen should love her country more than herself; she should be ready to die for it if the need arises.

The linguistic reform towards de-gendering or de-sexing the English language has assumed almost a comical undertone. Miller and Swift 1988, suggest some pronouns in place of the present sex-specific ones. *eis* used to refer to *he or she* while *irstands* for *her or him*. This usage would make our example sentence sound like:

Ex. 9. Every good citizen should love ir country more than irself; e should be ready to die for it if the need arises.

This usage totally rules out every trace of gender in the English pronoun. But the question is, does it sound acceptable?

In English morphology, occupational words are formed by adding bound morphemes to the original male term. This alone reiterates the dependant, subordinate and appendage nature of women. More often than

not, it makes unnecessary reference to the person's sex and suggests triviality, unimportance, or inferiority. Examples which readily come to mind here include, actor/actress, proprietor/proprietress, author/authoress, poet/poetess, host/hostess, usher/usheress (Hurley, 2009). The first in each of the pairs is now generally used to refer to both genders. It would therefore be appropriate to say:

Ex. 10. Jennifer is an actor.

Ex. 11. Mrs. Sunmonu is the Proprietor of Bloombreed High School.

## II. Data Analysis and Findings

Sexist language exists in various forms. The forms identified and examined in this study are restricted to the following:

1. singular masculine pronouns,
2. generic masculine words,
3. masculine use of genderless terms,
4. sexist suffixes,
5. unnecessary sex-marked qualifiers,
6. derogatory expressions,
7. gender-neutral language, and
8. pseudo-masculine expressions,

We shall now consider each of these in turns with emphasis on their occurrence in the newspapers, while also proffering alternatives to them.

### 2.1 Singular Masculine Pronouns

This is seen in the generic usage of singular masculine pronouns like he, his, him, etc. This could be avoided by using a gender neutral pronoun (also called the 'singular they') or better still, by pluralizing the noun referent, thus giving room for the use of a plural non-gender specific pronoun.

*The Punch Newspaper* exhibits two instances of such usage in,

1. If a child is found culpable of committing a crime, he would be tried and sentenced in accordance with the law (*The Punch*, June 25th 2012, p. 8 [5]).

2. Assuming somebody who is heading an agency that is supposed to handle corruption is not doing that and he says it's because of the President's body language, that person is not competent (*The Punch*, 25th June 2012, p. 8).

*The Guardian*, on the other hand exhibits one instance, as in:

3. But anyone who wishes to render an account of his stewardship to Nigeria and its people should himself – yes, himself, not a hack – write a book (*The Guardian* Editorial, 6th September 2012, p. 18 [6]).

All the examples above are sexist, as they presuppose that their referents are masculine. The first example assumes that a child is necessarily a male, and thus, instead of the neutral it, the masculine he is used. This also goes for somebody/he and anyone/his/himself in the second and third examples. The indefinite pronoun, *anyone* in the last example encompasses men and women but the pronouns *his* and *himself* betray this usage.

The table below presents the occurrences with alternative expressions.

**Table 1. Singular Masculine Pronouns in the Newspapers and Alternatives**

S/n	Expression	Newspaper	Alternative
1.	If a <u>child</u> is found culpable of committing a crime, <u>he</u> would be tried and sentenced in accordance with the law.	<i>The Punch</i> , 25th June 2012, p. 8	1. If a <u>child</u> is found culpable of committing a crime, <u>the child</u> would be tried and sentenced in accordance with the law. (gender neutral; repetition method)  2. If a <u>child</u> is found culpable of committing a crime, <u>it</u> would be tried and sentenced in accordance with the law. (gender neutral; neutralizing the referent)
1.	Assuming <u>somebody</u> who is heading an agency that is supposed to handle corruption is not doing that and <u>he</u> says it is because of the President's body language, that person is not competent.	<i>The Punch</i> , 25th June 2012, p. 8	1. Assuming <u>somebody</u> who is heading an agency that is supposed to handle corruption is not doing that and <u>he or she</u> says it is because of the President's body language, that person is not competent.  2. Assuming <u>somebody</u> who is heading an agency that is supposed to handle corruption is not doing that and <u>they</u> say it is because of the President's body language, that person is not competent.  3. Assuming <u>somebody</u> who is heading an agency that is supposed to handle corruption is not doing that and <u>theperson</u> says it is because of the President's

			body language, that person is not competent. 4. Assuming <u>somebody</u> who is heading an agency that is supposed to handle corruption is not doing that and <u>she or he</u> says it is because of the President's body language, that person is not competent.
2.	But <u>anyone</u> who wishes to render an account of <u>his</u> stewardship to Nigeria and its people should <u>himself</u> – yes, himself, not a hack – write a book.	The Guardian, 6th September, 2011 p. 18	1. ... <u>anyone</u> who wishes to render an account of <u>her or his</u> stewardship to Nigeria and its people should <u>himself or herself</u> .... 2. ... <u>citizens</u> who wish to render an account of <u>their</u> stewardship to Nigeria and its people should <u>themselves</u> .... (rephrasing/pluralizing)  3. ... <u>anyone</u> who wishes to render an account of <u>their</u> stewardship to Nigeria and its people should <u>themselves</u> ....

## 2.2 Generic Masculine Terms

Generic masculine terms are those expressions that refer to all humans, using obviously masculine terms as man, brother, father and many more. At times, the expressions refer to both male and female but end with the word man.

The study revealed that generic masculine words / expressions are the most commonly used in the newspapers, occurring eighty-three (83) times in the newspaper editions under review. The expressions are contained in the table below and alternatives to them have been provided.

**Table 2. Generic Masculine Expressions in the Newspapers and Alternatives**

S/n	Sexist expression	Newspaper	Alternative
1.	Section 159 of the 1999 Constitution as amended and the Rules of Procedures of the Council vide Section 160 are clear as to who presides over the Council meeting in the absence of the <u>Chairman or Deputy Chairman</u> .	The Guardian, 6th September 2011, p. 7	Section 159 of the 1999 Constitution as amended and the Rules of Procedures of the Council vide Section 160 are clear as to who presides over the Council meeting in the absence of the <u>Chairperson</u> .
2.	The <u>Chairman</u> , SUBEB, Prof. Modupe Adelabu said this when <u>she</u> paid a courtesy call on the Bishop of Catholic Diocese in the state, Most Rev. Felix Ajakaiye.	The Punch, 30th October 2011, p. 5	The <u>Chair/Chairperson</u> , SUBEB, Prof. Modupe Adelabu said this when <u>she</u> paid a courtesy call on the Bishop of Catholic Diocese in the state, Most Rev. Felix Ajakaiye.
3.	It reiterated its resolve to address the problem of insecurity facing the country, as well as to bring to book all those found to have <u>masterminded</u> or perpetrated violence the nation has faced in recent times.	The Guardian, 6th September 2011, p. 6	It reiterated its resolve to address the problem of insecurity facing the country, as well as to bring to book all those found to have <u>orchestrated</u> or perpetrated violence the nation has faced in recent times.
4.	A team of <u>policemen</u> from Ilaje Division were dispatched to the area and when the hoodlums sighted them, they immediately opened fire.	The Punch, 25th June 2012, p. 5	A team of <u>police officers/security personnel</u> from Ilaje Division were dispatched to the area and when the hoodlums sighted them, they immediately opened fire.
5.	This House fully subscribes to the transformation agenda of <u>Mr President</u> . It could invoke its legislative powers if that will get <u>Mr President</u> to assent to bills.	The Guardian, 6th September 2011, p. 4 The Punch, 25th June 2012, p. 9	This House fully subscribes to the transformation agenda of <u>the President</u> . It could invoke its legislative powers if that will get <u>the President</u> to assent to bills.
6.	... Tafida asked the people of the state to be their <u>brother's keeper</u> as well as eschew religious, ethnic and political sentiments.	The Guardian 6th September 2011, p. 7	... Tafida asked the people of the state to be <u>good neighbours</u> , as well as eschew religious, ethnic and political sentiments.
7.	Nigerians are more worried that the economic team generously features <u>businessmen</u> , who allegedly feed fat on the economy. We want them to change; we want them to become decent citizens; to become top <u>businessmen</u> in this country.	The Guardian, 25th June 2012, p. 1 The Punch, 25th June 2012, p. 5	Nigerians are more worried that the economic team generously features <u>investors/merchants</u> , who allegedly feed fat on the economy. We want them to change; we want them to become decent citizens; to become top <u>investors/entrepreneurs</u> in this country.
8.	Azazi should have resigned if he was a <u>man of integrity</u> .	The Punch, 25th June 2012, p. 11	Azazi should have resigned if he was <u>someone with integrity</u> .
9.	This leaves room for corruption by <u>middlemen</u> who are mainly civil servants.	The Punch, 25th June 2012, p. 16	This leaves room for corruption by <u>retailers</u> who are mainly civil servants.
10.	... we got to her office but the <u>security men</u>	The Guardian,	... we got to her office but the <u>security</u>

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	on duty that day stopped us from seeing her.	6th September 2011, p. 8	<u>personnel</u> on duty that day stopped us from seeing her.
11.	It was in this frame of mind that President Goodluck Jonathan earlier pledged his commitment to the principle of <u>one man one vote</u> .	The Punch, 25th June 2012, p. 15	It was in this frame of mind that President Goodluck Jonathan earlier pledged his commitment to the principle of <u>one voter one vote</u> .
12.	Each of the states should be in control of the security of their area while the federal authority should empower them to tackle any <u>man-made</u> , natural or environmental challenges.	The Punch, 25th June 2012, p. 9	Each of the states should be in control of the security of their area while the federal authority should empower them to tackle any natural, <u>artificial</u> or environmental challenges.
13.	... alla <u>man</u> needs to be told is that this is a religious cause.	The Guardian, 25th June 2012, p. 4	... all <u>someone</u> needs to be told is that this is a religious cause.
14.	If you feel hurt and refuse to pay, the next thing you see are <u>men</u> with ladders.	The Punch, 25th June 2012, p. 19	If you feel hurt and refuse to pay, the next thing you see are <u>people</u> with ladders.
15.	Meanwhile, <u>spokesman</u> of the Boko Haram sect, Abdul Qaqa, has denied that the group planted explosives at a Kano Mosque last Friday. The attempt by a CBN <u>spokesman</u> to explain away Sanusi's regalia episode underscores the fickleness of the act.	The Guardian, 25th June 2012, p. 1 The Punch, 25th June 2012, p. 18, 80	Meanwhile, <u>spokesperson</u> of the Boko Haram sect, Abdul Qaqa, has denied that the group planted explosives at a Kano Mosque last Friday. The attempt by a CBN <u>spokesperson</u> to explain away Sanusi's regalia episode underscores the fickleness of the act.
16.	But Amaechi, who spoke on Friday during an interactive session with <u>newsmen</u> in Port Harcourt, said the Governors only went to court over an issue concerning the payment of a certain amount to the states from excess crude account.	The Punch, 30th October 2011, p. 2, 7	But Amaechi, who spoke on Friday during an interactive session with <u>journalists</u> in Port Harcourt, said the Governors only went to court over an issue concerning the payment of a certain amount to the states from excess crude account.
17.	The Muslim <u>Brotherhood's</u> Mohammed Mursi has been declared the winner of Egypt's presidential election run-off.	The Punch, 25th June 2012, p. 82	The Muslim <u>Guild's</u> Mohammed Mursi has been declared the winner of Egypt's presidential election run-off.
18.	The <u>master plan</u> has the potential for enhancing socio-economic needs of Nigeria and other west African countries. The 2012 budget made no provision to address infrastructure in the Gas <u>Master Plan</u> .	The Guardian, 25th June 2012, p. 32 The Punch, 25th June 2012, p. 22	The <u>blueprint/original plan</u> has the potential for enhancing socio-economic needs of Nigeria and other west African countries. The 2012 budget made no provision to address infrastructure in the Gas <u>Plan</u> .
19.	More importantly, a healthy people is a wealthy nation but any nation that refuses to get its people healthy risks losing its <u>manpower</u> .	The Punch, 25th June 2012, p. 22	More importantly, a healthy people is a wealthy nation but any nation that refuses to get its people healthy risks losing its <u>labour force</u> .
20.	Suswan urges <u>kinsmen</u> in Jonathan's cabinet to be team players. Half of my <u>kinsmen</u> and families have been cut off.	The Guardian, 6th September 2011, p. 9 The Guardian, 25th June 2012, p. 7	Suswan urges <u>kinfolks</u> in Jonathan's cabinet to be team players. Half of my <u>townspeople</u> and families have been cut off.
21.	It was gathered that the youth were protesting against the killing of their <u>kinsmen</u> ....	The Punch, 25th June 2012, p. 5	It was gathered that the youth were protesting against the killing of their <u>tribes people/kinfolks</u> ....
22.	The <u>24-man</u> Economic Management Team is led by President Goodluck Jonathan with Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala as the Coordinating Minister for the economy.	The Guardian, 25th June 2012, p. 1 The Punch, 25th June 2012, p. 12	The <u>24-member</u> Economic Management Team is led by President Goodluck Jonathan with Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala as the Coordinating Minister for the economy.
23.	.... some <u>landlords</u> put up their residential houses for rent and they were turned into offices.	The Punch, 25th June 2012, p. 18	... some <u>landowners / property owners</u> put up their residential houses for rent and they were turned into offices.
24.	.... In her words, "it is now obvious that 30 days is not going to be enough time for INEC to do a good job...." Ekwunife, who is <u>Chairman</u> , House Committee on Environment listed other areas they deliberated on....	The Guardian, 25th June 2012, p. 3	.... In her words, "it is now obvious that 30 days is not going to be enough time for INEC to do a good job...." Ekwunife, who is <u>Chair/Chairperson/Presiding Officer</u> , House Committee on Environment listed other areas they deliberated on....
25.	Nigeria is a fragile nation in need of true <u>statesmen</u> to build consensus within and across the component groups to strengthen it and help move it forward.	The Guardian, Editorial 6th September 2011, p. 6	Nigeria is a fragile nation in need of true <u>politicians</u> to build consensus within and across the component groups to strengthen it and help move it forward.

The word *chairman* or *chairmen* tops the list, occurring thirty-eight (38) times, fifteen (15) in *The Guardian Newspaper* and twenty-three (23) times in *The Punch*. The word is used generically in instances

where the gender of the referent is known and when it is not, irrespective of whether the referent is male or female. An example illustrating the first point is seen in:

1. ... Section 159 of the 1999 Constitution as amended and the Rules of Procedures of the Council vide Section 160 are clear as to who presides over the Council meeting in the absence of the Chairman or Deputy Chairman (The Guardian Tuesday September 6, 2011 p.7).

In this example, the head of the Council could be male or female but the masculine ‘chairman’ is used in place of a gender-neutral term. The social implication of this is that the thought of a woman attaining such a position is almost a tall dream. The use of the generic ‘man’ no doubt will go a long way in making it the sole preserve of men.

2. The Chairman, SUBEB, Prof. ModupeAdelabu said this when she paid a courtesy call on the Bishop of Catholic Diocese in the state, Most Rev. Felix Ajakaiye (The Punch, 30th October 2011, p. 5 [7]).

Here, the Chairperson of the board being referred to is a woman, yet she is called chairman.

A similar case is seen in:

3. .... In her words, “it is now obvious that 30 days is not going to be enough time for INEC to do a good job...” Ekwunife, who is Chairman, House Committee on Environment listed other areas they deliberated on... (The Guardian, 25th June 2012, p. 3 [8])

In this example as in the preceding one, the head of the committee is a woman but is referred to with masculine *chairman*. This use obliterates the woman and should therefore be avoided. In either case, a gender neutral term should have been used. Alternative expressions to the sexist expressions, including the three just mentioned above have been provided in Table 3.

The table below isolates individual sexist terms identified in the dailies and suggests alternatives to them.

**Table 3. Alternatives to Identified Generic Masculine Terms**

S/n	Sexist expression	Alternative
1.	chairman	chair, chairperson, head
2.	Mr. President	the President
3.	security men	security personnel / operatives
4.	lordships	honours, (as in Your Honour)
5.	spokesman	spokesperson, anchor, information officer
6.	kinsmen	kinfolks, tribes people, natives, townspeople
7.	policemen	police officers, police, law enforcement agents/officers
8.	statesmen	diplomats, politicians
9.	his / himself	them/themselves, his or her, her or his
10.	newsmen	reporters, journalists, correspondents, news operators
11.	our men (referring to police officers, which no doubt include women)	our officers, our force
12.	landlords	land owners, landholders, property owners
13.	man-made	artificial, synthetic
14.	seven-man committee	seven-person committee
15.	businessmen	investors, entrepreneurs
16.	middlemen	retailers, go-betweens
17.	master plan	blueprint, original plan, design
18.	one man, one vote	one voter, one vote / one person, one vote
19.	manpower	labour force

These sexist expressions make women invisible. They may also contribute immensely to the second or unimportant role accorded women in many societies. The title ‘Mr’, used with ‘President’ presupposes that the office is only for men. ‘Mrs. President’ would sound anachronistic, almost as a misnomer. This explains why the idea of a woman occupying the office is novel to most Nigerians, and there can be no doubt that with the almost unalterable dimension the expression has taken in the political scene in Nigeria, the title, ‘Mr’ would still be used inadvertently to refer to a woman who occupies the office, if that ever becomes a reality.

Generic masculine words occur fifty-two (52) times in *The Punch* and thirty-one (31) times in *The Guardian*. The study reveals that the word ‘chairman’ is the most commonly used generic masculine term. It appears thirty-eight (38) times in the newspapers. This is followed by the word ‘policeman’, which occurred eleven (11) times in *The Punch* and four (4) times in *The Guardian*. The third is the word ‘spokesman/spokesmen’, which occurs four (4) times in *The Punch* and six (6) times in *The Guardian*. Next in line is newsmen/newsmen, which appears six (6) times in *The Punch* and three (3) times in *The Guardian*. The chart below presents the findings graphically.

**Table 4. Occurrence of Generic Masculine Terms**

Word	Number of occurrence
Chairman	38
Policeman	15
spokesman/spokesmen	10
newsman/newsmen	9

**2.3 Masculine Use of Genderless Terms**

Some terms are referentially genderless but are used in such a way that they apply to males only. Almost any word can be used in this way. The following are good examples of such usage.

**Table 5. Examples of Masculine Use of Genderless Terms**

S/n	Sexist usage	De-sexed usage
1.	Farmers and their wives hardly live a comfortable life.	Farmers and their spouses hardly live a comfortable life.
2.	Teachers often educate their wives and children.	Teachers often educate their families/family members.
3.	Adventurers often go about without the company of their wives.	Adventurers often go about without the company of their spouses/mates.
4.	Many Nigerians maltreat their wives.	Many Nigerians maltreat their mates.
5.	The Director of a company and his secretary.	The Directors of a company and their secretaries. The Director of a company and his or her secretary.

There are no identified instances of masculine use of genderless terms in the newspaper editions under review.

**2.4 Sexist Suffixes**

Some suffixes are inherently sexist. This is the case when suffixes that mark gender are added to nouns to feminize them. It should be noted that such usage is now frowned upon and considered a descent from decent and acceptable writing. Thus, *actor* for instance, could refer to either a female or a male who acts without necessarily drawing a line between a male or a female who acts with the use of sexist suffixes. The following table explicates this further.

**Table 6. Examples of Sexist Suffixes**

S/n	Sexist	Non-sexist
1.	actress	actor
2.	authoress	author
3.	heroine	hero
4.	hostess	host
5.	poetess	poet
6.	proprietress	proprietor
7.	usherette	usher

The data gathered from the newspapers do not exhibit any instance of sexist suffixes.

**2.5 Sex-Marked Modifiers**

This is mostly seen in occupation words. The use of these modifiers suggests that the occupation in question is solely for men or women and a woman or man who dabbles into such a profession or field of endeavour is an intruder, a quack or a second rated professional. The following examples illustrate this.

**Table 7. Examples of Sex-marked Modifiers**

S/n	Sexist usage	Non-sexist usage
1.	lady doctor	doctor
2.	male nurse	nurse
3.	male secretary	secretary
4.	heroic women	heroes

*The Guardian Newspaper* exhibits two instances of this, while *The Punch* exhibits one instance in the expressions,

1. Ebonyi women protest suspension of female legislator for alleged drunkenness, riding kekeNAPEP (*The Guardian* 25th June 2012, p. 13).
2. As the flames rose, women activists handed out leaflets appealing for help and protection (*The Punch* 30th October 2012, p. 11).

- Speaking as the chairman at the 90th birthday celebration, which was organized by the International Federation of Female Lawyers (FIDA), Mbanefo said Nigeria's position raised diplomatic issues for the country (The Guardian 6th September 2011, p. 13).

A look at the examples above shows that the word *female* or *women* used as a modifier, though clarifies the gender of the group of people being mentioned (lawyers, activists, legislators) also goes to show that women in that category are second-rated. The expression, *women activists*, for instance shows that women are not the real activists. The use of *female* as an adjective before *legislator* also buttresses the fact that the business of law making is not primarily for women. It is true that at times, it may be necessary to point out gender for clarification, for instance, a pressure group made up of only female doctors may be referred to as Association of Female Doctors but this does not rule out the fact that such women are second class professionals. This usage should be discouraged as much as possible, as it draws attention to gender.

## 2.6 Derogatory Expressions

This form of sexist language refers to language which undermines, derogates or marginalizes women and men through adverse naming. It includes writing or saying unpleasant things about someone with reference to their gender such that negative opinions can be formed about them.

*The Guardian Newspaper* contains two (2) examples of derogatory expressions in the words 'gunmen' and 'mastermind' (violence). The only derogatory word in *The Punch Newspaper* is 'gunmen', which appears seven (7) times in the newspaper. It occurs in such expressions as:

- "We received security alert from the Coordinator of Operation Yaki that some churches in Kaduna metropolis ... are likely to be attacked on June 24 by gunmen disguised as women, using Improvised Explosive Devise and AK47 and riding on motorbikes (The Punch, 25th June 2012, p. 10).
- Gunmen kill two students in Yola (The Guardian Headline, 6th September 2011, p. 5).
- On May 4, the Principal Private Secretary to Governor Adams Oshiomole was murdered by yet-to-be-identified gunmen (The Punch, 25th June 2012, p. 15).
- Unknown gunmen on Sunday attacked Damaturu Prisons in Yobe State, killing one prison official and setting free 41 inmates (The Punch, 25th June 2012, p. 78).
- Gunmen killed three policemen in a driveway by shooting on the outskirts of Pakistan's troubled south-western city of Quetta on Sunday, police said (The Punch, 25th June 2012, p. 85).
- It reiterated its resolve to address the problem of insecurity facing the country as well as bring to book all those found to have masterminded or perpetrated the violence the nation has faced in recent times (The Guardian, 6th September 2011, p. 6).

The use of these expressions is both uncalled for and misleading. This point is better appreciated if one considers the adjectives used in the expressions. They are: unknown (gunmen). yet-to-be-identified (gunmen).

Thus, if they are 'unknown' or 'yet to be identified', then we cannot authoritatively say they are men and it would be wrong and unjust to ascribe such criminal acts to men. Experience has shown that women are almost equally involved in crime as men. For example, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services reports that women are the fastest-growing demographic group in prison. According to a Canadian Public Health Agency report, the rate of violent crimes doubled among male youth during the late 1980s and 1990s, while it almost tripled among female youth. According to Gostin, Vanchieri and Pope (2007:19 [9]), "The female prisoner population (in the US) has been rising at a faster rate than the male prisoner population. The overall increase since 1995 for male prisoners is 32 per cent and for female prisoners, 53 per cent".

The social implication of referring to wanted criminals with masculine terms is that the police are constrained with the mind-set that the culprits must be men. In their search for the suspects, they are ten times more likely to be targeting men than women. This may be a false trail or red herring, since all efforts and energy will be channelled into looking solely for men while the real culprits who may be women are at large.

The expressions are de-sexed in the table below.

**Table 8. Alternatives to Identified Derogatory Expressions**

S/n	Derogatory expression	Newspaper	Alternative
1.	"We received security alert from the Coordinator of Operation Yaki that some churches in Kaduna metropolis ... are likely to be attacked on June 24 by <u>gunmen</u> disguised as women, using Improvised Explosive Devise and AK47 and riding on motorbikes".	The Punch, 25th June 2012, p. 10	"We received security alert from the Coordinator of Operation Yaki that some churches in Kaduna metropolis ... are likely to be attacked on June 24 by <u>gunners/shooters</u> disguised as women, using Improvised Explosive Devise and AK47 and riding on motorbikes".
2.	<u>Gunmen</u> kill two students in Yola.	The Guardian headline, 6th September 2011, p. 5.	<u>Armed persons/assassins</u> kill two students in Yola.
3.	On May 4, the Principal Private Secretary to Governor Adams Oshiomole was murdered by <u>yet-to-be-identified gunmen</u> .	The Punch, 25th June 2012, p. 15	On May 4, the Principal Private Secretary to Governor Adams Oshiomole was murdered by <u>yet-to-be-identified gunners</u> .

4.	<u>Unknown gunmen</u> on Sunday attacked Damaturu Prisons in Yobe State, killing one prison official and setting free 41 inmates.	The Punch, 25th June 2012, p. 78	<u>Unknown shooters/gunners/armed persons</u> on Sunday attacked Damaturu Prisons in Yobe State, killing one prison official and setting free 41 inmates.
5.	<u>Gunmen</u> killed three policemen in a driveway by shooting on the outskirts of Pakistan’s troubled south-western city of Quetta on Sunday, police said.	The Punch, 25th June 2012, p. 85	<u>Armed persons</u> killed three police officers in a driveway by shooting on the outskirts of Pakistan’s troubled south-western city of Quetta on Sunday, police said.
6.	It reiterated its resolve to address the problem of insecurity facing the country as well as bring to book all those found to have <u>masterminded</u> or perpetrated the violence the nation has faced in recent times.	The Guardian Headline, 6th September 2011, p. 6	It reiterated its resolve to address the problem of insecurity facing the country as well as bring to book all those found to have <u>orchestrated</u> or perpetrated the violence the nation has faced in recent times.

### 2.7 Gender Neutral Language

Gender-neutral language either has no reference to gender or it simultaneously refers to both genders. It is commendable that the newspapers make use of some gender-neutral expressions. There are ten (10) instances of this in *The Punch* and four (4) in *The Guardian*, totalling fourteen (14) in the two newspapers. The example expressions are given below:

1. He said the five-member panel (as opposed to ‘five-man panel’) would be headed by retired Supreme Court Justice, Pius Aderemi... – The Guardian, 6th September 2011, p. 5.
2. A five-member (as opposed to five-man) adhoc committee set up by the federal government on February 23rd, 2012, has recommended that prisons across the country should be fortified as they were not secured enough to prevent armed attacks and jail breaks – The Punch, 25th June 2012, p. 85.
3. Some of the churches that were mentioned in the text messages were empty on Sunday while others were guarded by heavily armed soldiers and other security operatives (as opposed to sexist ‘policemen’) – The Punch, 25th June 2012, p. 85.
4. Between 1960 when the country became independent and 1970, agriculture accounted for over 70 per cent of export revenues, employed over 75 per cent of the workforce (as opposed to manpower) while Nigeria was self-sufficient in food – The Punch, 30th October, 2011, p. 13.
5. Investigations by our correspondent showed that the SSS ignored the call for assistance from the police because it had not been directed to do so by the Presidency – The Punch, 25th June 2012, p. 12.
6. Spokesperson (as opposed to ‘spokesman’) for the group, Mrs Doris Obiageli said the unwarranted suspension of the legislator was not only a taboo in democracy but a crime against women and the people of Ivo constituency whom Igwe represents. – The Punch, 25th June 2012, p. 9.
7. ... so that an average Nigerian can have shelter over their head instead of paying rent – The Punch, 25th June 2012, p. 23.
8. The head (as opposed to chairman) panel of judges, Farouk Sultan said it had upheld some of the 466 complaints by the candidates – The Punch 25th June 2012, p. 82.

### 2.8 Pseudo-Masculine Expressions

What this study terms ‘pseudo-masculine’ expressions are words which seem to reflect masculine undertone, as a result of their semantic morphology. *The Punch Newspaper* presents two of such words. They are Ombudsman and mandate. It is subject to controversy whether these words, (like human, female, woman, etc.) as a result of their morphology are sexist or neutral. Public Complaints Commission, supervisory body, regulator, etc., would be more appropriate and safer than Ombudsman, while fiat, responsibility, obligation, permission, etc., would be preferable to mandate.

## III. Conclusion

The study revealed that Nigerian newspapers make use of sexist language in its various forms and that sexist language is not only a bias against the female but also the male, as data gathered and analysed revealed instances where the masculine gender was also addressed with popular unpalatable terms and expressions. Generic masculine words are the most commonly used forms of sexist expressions in Nigerian newspapers. The word, *chairman* is the most frequently used generic and this is followed by *policeman*, *spokesman/spokesmen*, and *newsmen/newsmen* in that order. Derogatory / vilifying expressions and singular masculine pronouns are also prominently used, occurring nine (9) and five (5) times respectively.

It is good to note that Nigerian newspapers, like their foreign counterparts, are making good progress in using gender neutral forms. There were fourteen (14) different cases where gender neutral forms were used. This is a laudable achievement considering the fact that the 2012 editions of the newspapers used more of gender neutral forms than the 2011 editions. This is a pointer to the fact that in the years ahead, sexist forms will continue to diminish and may eventually disappear from the Nigerian print media, at least from the first choice

newspapers; *The Guardian, The Punch, The Nation, The Sun, The Vanguard, The Nigerian Tribune* and other quality Nigerian tabloids.

This study forms a bridge between the feminist view of sexist language and the realities in the language, as it provides a balanced and objective interpretation of sexist language occurrences in the Nigerian print media. Unlike what is believed in some quarters, the study showed that sexist language is not only a bias against women but also against men. It further revealed that the use of sexist language in the media may have some dire socio-political implications. For instance, referring to an unknown killer as a 'gunman' may largely influence police search in tracking men even though experience as shown that women are as equally involved in crime as men. Women are also at a disadvantaged position in the language as it is in the case of using obvious male terms as generics, for instance, the title 'Mr' before 'President' may preclude that the office is meant for only men. Since no gender benefits from sexist language, the study champions the need for advocacy towards de-gendering the English Language by providing alternatives to identified sexist language.

### **3.1 Recommendations**

Research is an on-going process and new bodies of knowledge develop on a daily basis. This study has shed some light on the forms and patterns of sexist language in the Nigerian print media. The study, though was restricted to only two out of the numerous Nigerian dailies could be regarded as giving a holistic view of what Nigerian dailies portray. It is believed that the findings will help news editors and reporters in a great way to avoid sexist forms in their news editing and reportage, since these are becoming obsolete.

The sample population may however be considered too few for a broad based or general view. It is recommended that further studies in the area of sexist language should consider other equally popular Nigerian newspapers, like *The Sun, The Vanguard, The Nation, The Nigerian Tribune* and others. This will make the findings more encompassing and reliable, since it is a known fact that many Nigerian readers maintain a very strong link with their choice newspaper. Whatever effort is made towards de-sexing expressions by editors in a newspaper other than their favourite newspaper may go unnoticed by them. A more encompassing research would go a long way in reaching more Nigerian readers, columnists, editors, and reporter, and by extension, ensure that many Nigerians are abreast with the trend in the English language and bring them to par with what obtains internationally. Other research works in this area may also focus on sexist language in the broadcast media in Nigeria, Radio or TV. Radio stations like FRCN, Raypower, Voice of Nigeria, Rhythm and Nigeria Info, which are award-winning stations would provide good research data, while TV stations like NTA, AIT, Silverbird, Channels and Galaxy. would do same if the research were to focus on TV channels in Nigeria.

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