Socio-cultural and psychological analysis of gender discriminative language

Chipanda Simon & Regina M. Maunde
Mwalimu Nyerere Memorial University of Tanzania

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Abstract
The paper examines on socio-cultural and psychological analysis of language and gender discrimination. The motivation behind the examination was due to the increase of discriminated language assigned to gender. Literature shows that lack of awareness and education in large trigger discriminative language. This motivates investigation as the suggested factors are questionable. The paper used deficit, dominance and identity control theories in explaining gender and language of discrimination. The study used an ethnographical study and a case study design where Mwalimu Nyerere Memorial Academy of Tanzania was a case for investigation. The study was qualitative in nature, whereby words, phrases and sentences were used in the data analysis stage. It was found that pitch rate, dressing styles, body structures, class presentation and group discussion were the areas where the gendered language was evidenced in favour of females as the result words like buttocks, smooth pitch, half necked, don't be like a girl, be strong and rhythm pitch result from women themselves against men. Thus, discriminative words are mostly triggered by females themselves. Based on the findings, it was concluded that females should stand themselves; they should not think that their body appearance and biological makeup trigger them to create environments of gendered words.

Introduction

This paper investigates on the socio-cultural and psychological determinants of gendered languages as men and women use it in their life circle. Historically, studies between language and gender can be traced far back from the late 1960s when the second wave of feminism emerged and put their attention on how language shapes social authenticity and practical function as an agent of social transformation (Cf. Bern, 1993). Language and gender differences have exhausted debates about the use of language by men and women as they show differences in the use of language. This can be observed in Wahyuningsih (2018), who thought that there are many forms of linguistic differences between men and women, e.g., women use colourful words, such as vocabulary and adjectives like incredible, sweet, and loved, which are seldom used by men. It can be noted that the different use of language does not emanate gender discrimination in relation to these differences using language and

gender. Others argue that causes of this topic are the result of social and community behaviour of stigmatisation (Cf. Mchepange, 2021 Khatib, 2015, Mhewa, 2020, Kaihula, 1995) to mention just but a few.

It has been argued that some workers in different institutions are unaware of gendered language. This can be evidenced in Mhewa's (2020) investigation on gender-responsive language use and Students' participation in learning in Tanzanian Secondary Schools in the Monduli district and Mbulu town council from Tanzania mainland. Mhewa's questionnaires, interviews and classroom observations found that secondary school teachers had limited knowledge on gender-responsive language, which constrained their ability to use gender-responsive language in the classroom. Thus, teachers used gender language or/or phrases which perpetuated superiority and inferiority between boys and girls, respectively. It was recommended there should be extra efforts to raise teachers' knowledge of gender-responsive language so that none of the students would be denied learning chances because of the gender irresponsive language. However, under the level of analysis, there might be sources for teachers to use such words that trigger gender superiority. It is this study that investigates, whether these sources are either female or male sources or both.

Khatib (2015) researched language and gender stereotypes in Kiswahili print media, with emphasis on the gutter press and posters. In his documentary and interview instruments of data collection, the author found that language used in the gutter press and posters portray women more negatively than men. That is to say, the stereotypes emerged through different themes such as marriage and relationships, prostitution, persecution, scandals, fights, infertility and biological disorder, family care, superiority, superstition, beauty, body attraction, brutality, empowerment and homosexuality. However, based on these results, the study concluded that linguistic features such as word categories, phrases, clauses, sentences, moods, voice, rhetorical devices and code-mixing had a great deal in signalising gender stereotypes portrayed in gutter newspapers and posters. Through these techniques, women have been marginalised as they have been portrayed as human beings full of evil deeds, scandals, prostitution and theft (Khatib, 2015:91). This study attracts attention to the currents investigation to seen sources of sociocultural and psychological discrimination pertinent to language and gender in Tanzania.

Within the family level, women seem to contribute significantly but still, it is from this level where she is discriminated against, exploited and disregarded (Cf. Kaihula, 1995). This is also supported in Kipacha (2008), who thought that women themselves bear witness that they are at the bottom of all the hierarchies of power and privileges; they form the majority of the neediest, the most marginal and the most unprivileged. Even if her success to the family, her contribution will still not be appreciated by the family and society. However, the song of women being discriminated against is not new in literature. Still, the current investigation desires to see the causes of this discrimination if the sources are women themselves or other factors other than them.

Mchepange (2021) investigated the evidence of gender (thematically) resulting from transport facilities as cars, buses, etc. The author collected data from different areas in Tanzania through documentary analysis of linguistic landscapes as in words written at Lorries, coasters, three–legged vehicles, also known as Bajaji in Tanzania, bicycles, and WhatsApp and Facebook. Also, the interview was applied where bus conductors and drivers were interviewed. The study found that sayings reflect gender contents as in love, behaviour, economy and education. Thus, from these reflections, the community's understanding pertinent to women was recommended to change for gender and equity provision. Therefore, Mchapange's research is very significant as it has shown what happens in transport facilities as well as media pertinent to gender discrimination. Therefore, this makes us think

about the sources of these discriminative sayings if they happen externally of women themselves or are socio-cultural in origin.

Gender and gendered language are rooted in the premise of inferior power position being reflected in women's language. From this view, it came to be placed under the broad subheading of the Dominance Approach. This approach holds that as compared to men, in conversations, women's speech is more interspersed with back channeling signals and less opposition to interruption. In contrast, men's speech behaviours show a tendency towards holding the power centre, more interruptions, and challenges (Abdalgane, 2021, p. 208). Therefore, the current study was guided by multiple theories because of its root and endless debate on gendered language of discrimination. These are deficit, dominance and identity control theories proposed by different scholars (Cf. Lakoff, 1975; Coates, 1986; Tannen, 1990) pertinent to the fields of language and gender.

The deficit theory refers to the theory that indicates that the language style that women use 'submerges a women's identity by denying her the means to express herself strongly and encouraging expressions that suggest triviality in subject matter and uncertainty about it'' (Lakoff, 1975, p. 7)   This means the features that women use in their speech style denies expressing themselves instead make them sound 'trivial' and 'uncertain'. This theory cannot handle the status of women whose language is not deficit; thus, this adapted dominance theory. The dominance theory focuses on the distribution of power in society and that women's speech reflects their subordination position. According to Fishman (1908), women do '*shitwork*' in conversation. This happens when men interrupt them in conversation, and women fairly seems to be their right to keep silent.

The two theories cannot handle some words and feelings of discriminative language used by women who are not dominated. Coates (1994) argued that there is no place within it for valuing the style of speech associated with women; the use of all the identified features of women is seen as a signal of submission or lack of assertion. Such weakness can be solved by identity control theory. Identity control theory is applied to show how emotions operate within an internal control system to stabilise gendered identities and perpetuate the social structure. This theory is rooted in the family level, both by mothers and fathers, and supports and strengthens identities; children learn what behaviour is acceptable for specific circumstances and generally *never* acceptable (Cf. Carter, 2014). This socialisation is acquired differently by males and females, and the gender identities formed differentiate the sexes in all levels of interaction. Bell (2004: 56) stresses that boys recognise that what they are supposed to be is what their mothers are not…Rejecting femininity is then consonant with denigrating femininity so that tasks, traits, and qualities associated with being feminine are considered less socially valuable than are tasks, traits, and qualities associated with being masculine. Therefore, this theory fits the current study as some of the gendered words reject femininity conception and perpetuate throughout the life course for males.

Methodology

This study used a case study design. Punch (2005) alludes that almost anything can serve as a case of which can include individuals, a role or occupation, organization, a policy, a community, or even a country. Thus, from this base the current study used the Mwalimu Nyerere Memorial Academy, a higher learning institution. The study applied ethnography research as part of interpretivism paradigm. Ethnography focuses on human culture and discovering the relationship between culture and behavior, the important of this paradigm is that ethnographers pay attention (Cf. Gray, 2014; Barasa, 2023). This made qualitative method of data collection to be applied from people's behavior whereby nonparticipant observation was applied in both college students of the second year.

Ethnography is the study through direct observation of users in their natural context. That is why the study applied this form of research to observe how people use gendered language in their daily conversation. Four months have been used to observe the class of 232 undergraduate second-year students who undertook change studies in one semester of four months. The data was analyzed by reflecting theories of gender and power as well as thematic analysis techniques to make sense of the qualitative data collected through lecture observations. All the six (6) stages of data analysis were followed in data familiarisation and organisation, creating initial codes, generating initial themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, then findings presentation and interpretation (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Discussion of the findings
The section presents the results from the field pertinent to socio-cultural and psychological phenomena of gender discriminative language. Note that ethnography was the paradigmatic approach for data collection.

Class presentation
This is the first case where we observe language and gender discrimination; in our observation in the classroom, it has been seen that most women (girls) avoid presenting in front of their fellow students. For example, in nine groups of students, there were only two groups in which female students were observed presenting group work. Under the observation level, it seems that women feel shame for no reason. When asked indirectly as to why most group presenters are boys, one of the girls said:

> **1. Kiswahili:** 'Huwa naogopa sana kuwasilisha mbele ya wavulana… naogopa kuchekwa…sasa nihangaike ya nini na wanaume wapo? Huwa hawana shida (Akaangalia chini huku akitabasamu**…**)
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> **Translation:** *I often afraid of presenting in front of boys …I afraid of being laughed …how can I be disturbed while men are available? They don't worry. She looks down by smiling.*

The above quotation shows that some of the girls use words that determine discriminative language. When she says boys are available that she cannot disturb herself is the idea that some of the women ignore themselves using their own speech. The reason for doing this can be a psychological or family-constructed phenomenon. The expressed discriminative gender language is in line with identity control theory whereby fear and dislike of experiencing negative emotion solidifies gendered behaviour (Cf. Elkin & Gerald,1989; Stockard, 1999).

Group discussion
This is another context in which language discrimination has been observed; it is the tendency of lecturers to provide group work for the students to discuss. Within the group discussion, some structural sentences happen among the group members pertinent to language and gender discrimination. Consider the following statements from the group members:

> **2. Kiswahili:** '…Leo tumechelewa sana kujadiliana hasa hasa Anna kachelewa masaa mawili…'Anna akatabasamu na akajibu…sisi wanawake tuna mambo mengi …tuoge vizuri, tusafishe uso ung'ae ilitupendeze sio kama nyie wanaume huamka tun akusepa…'
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> **Translation**: *Today we are too late for or discussion especially Anna is late for two hours… (Anna smiled and responded) … as women we have many issues compared to men… good and critical birthing, cleaning our faces for visibility …. We are unlike (you) men who just wake up and move…'*

Looking at the above speech, it is observed that women themselves seem to claim that they are special concerning cleaning their bodies for visibility to men. The language that a girl has applied is because of being a woman, she looks so special for cleaning her body, not for other reasons but special for being visible to men; is one among the statements which psychologically segregates men. The statement is in line with identity theory and dominance theory, where women seem to create an identity that cleaning their bodies is a special thing for them. The practice of cleaning the body is an agenda of discussion dominated by women. The reason for this statement can be psychologically or socially constructed through agents of socialisation such as family, schools and the community at large. In other words, children and women are socially imitating these forms of socialisation.

Words related to body structure

Women's appearance differs from men's; this kind of difference is biological and natural. In our ethnographical investigation, it has been observed that women with big and fat buttocks have been named with different names and are related to attracting men pertinent to sexual matters. When walking, buttocks play, and sometimes, women make their buttocks play unnaturally to attract men. From this context, we have observed some gendered words related in favour of women. Thus, one of the female learners said:

3. **Kiswahili:** Mwanamke tako bwana sura ni majaliwa

Translation: Women are defined by buttocks; appearance is God's will

The above expressions show that buttocks have been observed bearing for women and not men even though men also have such parts of the body. Our fundamental question is, what is the source of this expression? Is it oriented men-oriented or women-oriented? Experiences indicate that it is not men-oriented because women themselves are happy to have big buttocks, and those who lack big buttocks are inferior. That is why the quoted text above comes from girls as a culturally shaped group of attributes given to the female. Humm (1989, p. 64) added that cultural shaping is an ongoing, lifelong process, which means that basically, gender is unstable and multiple or no unitary. With this context of view, women having big protruding buttocks seem to be a shaped group.

Voice rate

It has been observed that most female genders possess low sound volume while men possess pitch. The former is related to weak but attractive volume and latter to a strong but not attractive but instructive volume. This was observed when one of the girls was quoted saying:

4. **Kiswahili:** Yule CR mwenye sauti ya Kiume hajafika

Translation: That CR with a male voice has not come

The information quoted above shows that the nature of the pitch between women and men has been a symbol of language and gender discrimination. As we see above, women themselves understand that they speak unlike men pertinent to voice level. Thus, the voice level between men and women has been gendered in our natural life route. Thus, the exemplified low level of sound is in consonant with deficit theory (Cf. Lakoff, 1975, p. 75), which thought that women's language ''submerges a woman's identity, y denying her the means to express herself strongly and encouraging expressions that suggest triviality in subject matter and uncertainty about it''.

This kind of submerging of women into men has been a lesson which is understood by men in the fact that they are strong enough to dominate women in different topics of discussion. This is consonant

with dominance theory (Cf. Fishman, 1980), which is grounded in the style of men's domination in speech and suggests that women's speech reflects their subordinate position. From this base, we can refer to one of the discourses for the second-year gender student:

> **5. Kiswahili**: Kaza, acha kulegea kama demu

> **Translation:** Be strong, don't be like a girl

The information above shows that, psychologically, girls or women seem weak and perform simple activities, unlike men. In other words, such ideology is culturally based understanding. This can be linked with identity control theory, which claims that the fact that gender construction occurs early by psychoanalytic processes is only one facet of gendered identity construction. That is to say socialisation from the family, both by mothers and fathers, supports, and strengthens identities; children learn what acceptable behaviour for specific circumstances is and what behaviour is generally *never* acceptable (Carter, 2014, p. 216). This is with the same line of thinking as Bell (2004), who said:

> [B]oys' identification with masculinity, necessary to attain the correct gender role, happens through rejecting what stands for femininity. Boys come to recognise that what they are supposed to be is what their mothers are not…Rejecting femininity is then consonant with denigrating femininity, so that tasks, traits, and qualities associated with being feminine are considered less socially valuable than are tasks, traits, and qualities associated with being masculine (Bell, 2004, p. 156).

From this quotation, it can be argued that rejection of femininity occurs early in the family where we live; as a result, human beings grow while understanding that women can act X while men can act Y and not vice versa. With this regard, the conversation between female and male gender offers an account of how power is operationalised in conversation; in other words, the way families construct gender can be used to explain the reproduction of patriarchy as children learn gender-appropriate language use, which also teaches them their correct role in society-domination or submission (Fishman, 1980). The dominance, identity control and deficit theories have forgotten the role of women that even though they seem to be controlled. Note that men suppress women's speech, but the results of women's speech are very tangible; for instance, men act materially to women as the result of being requested by women whom we say have been suppressed in speech.

Words related to dressing style

The style of wearing has created language and gender discrimination; women wearing sometimes is not like men wearing styles. These kinds of clothes that men and women wear have become sources of language and gender discrimination. This means that some of the statements or words would not have appeared without such wearing styles. For example, one of the boys said:

> 6. **Kiswahili:** Mmmm!... amevaa nusu uchi kama changudoa ama dadapoa

> **Translation:** Mmmm! She has as dressed in half necked as body sellers

The above quotation shows that some women's dresses are gendered, which encounter the appearance of some gendered words or phrases to be used by either themselves or men. Biologically, most of the body parts of women are sexy; for that matter, their wearing should be sensitive in covering erotic parts of their bodies. In contrast, women themselves prefer wearing shorts like pants, targeting to attract men. Clothes, such as those that are supposed to be put on at night are likely to be put on during the day. Despite a woman is known as '*Mwanamke niua' (Kiswahili)*, which means 'A

woman is a flower' (Cf. Karakacha, et al 2020, p. 110) appeals to both the sense of sight and of smell, that is beauty and fragrance, which are objects of love expression. With this regard, these styles of women or girls wearing cause the appearance of gendered words like likely *changudoa,* meaning 'body sellers' or '*dadapoa',* meaning 'simple sisters who sell their body without rejecting any price'. These gendered words cannot be manifested to the opposite sex, meaning male persons. Under the level of discussion, the activities associated with girls who sell their bodies are understood in the scope of socialisation and gender theory.

That is to say; once actors develop identity meanings, they are motivational toward behaviour (Cf. Stryker, 1980). In identity theory, the self is a reflexive process revealed in social interaction and portrayed to others through identities that fit specific situations. Women seem to fit in the scope of words they are called other than the callers of these words. It can be generally said that gendered words, such as *'changudoa'* and *'dada poa'* are words that discriminate against male genders in the community we live. The reason for this phenomenon is the result of the female genders themselves other than the male gender. This means that if women had not been acting or selling their bodies to men, such gendered words or discriminated words would not have been spoken.

Conclusion

The paper has examined socio-cultural and psychological factors triggering gender discriminative language in the community in which we live. Within the cover of deficit, dominance, identity, and control theories have indicated explanatory adequacies pertinent to gender and discriminative language. It has been found that men cannot be blamed for gender and discriminative language at all; women's style of life has been the point of reference in the debate on gendered language. From this base, female biological makeup, pitch movement, body structure, physical appearance, and dressing styles are among the factors of gender and discriminative language. It must be noted that these factors are influenced mainly by females themselves as they think they are made by the nature they are doing. It is generally advised women themselves should not use the way they are naturally born, and there should not be room for gendered language of discrimination. They should stand as complete human beings rather than creating environments for gendered words.

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