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**A SURVEY OF GENDER POLITICS AND THE USE OF
ENGLISH AMONG STUDENTS OF THE DEPARTMENT OF
ENGLISH STUDIES, UNIVERSITY OF PORT HARCOURT**

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Abstract

This study investigated feminist consciousness and the differences in the use of English language among undergraduates in the Department of English Studies (EST), University of Port Harcourt, Port Harcourt, Nigeria. The theoretical basis of the study is Radical Feminism and the researchers used a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) to collect data for the study. The researchers collected data from three groups each of which consisted of ten final year students who formed panels to discuss gender issues while the researchers moderated. The data was analysed with framework analysis, simple percentages, and significant ratios. The study revealed that the participants were actively engaged in gender politics, used English in significantly different styles, but tended to be equally divided on their total allegiance to their gender groups. The study concluded that EST students are actively engaged in gender politics and confirmed the existence of some of the differences between male and female speech identified by earlier studies. Therefore, it recommended, among others, that curriculum design on the subject should shift from aggression and divisiveness to integration and mutual respect for not just named gender groups, but also for all humans.

Key Words: gender politics, Feminism, focal group discussion, gender and language, variation

Introduction

Feminism is a movement to end all forms of the oppression of the female gender and it is a part of the broad search for social justice and equality by humans. It is similar to the civil agitation for religious rights, political determination, ethnic/tribal rights, the rights of minority

populations, and the rights of physically challenged persons. However, feminism has become more prominent than other forms of agitation in public discourse; including the wave of anticolonial movements that brought independence to former colonized parts of Africa and Asia. Through a multi-faceted campaign that has grown into political, social, linguistic, and educational philosophies, feminists have consistently achieved landmark changes in many aspects of traditional social structure that had been too unfair to females. For instance, until quite recently, no mainstream religion allowed females to be ordained priests and females were grossly marginalized in political and cultural leaderships. But presently, the narrative has changed, although there are still some obstacles to complete equality of both genders in these aspects of life.

Early women liberation movements were largely focused on the attainment of equal rights for women in employment opportunities, educational/professional opportunities and the rights to vote and be voted for in elections. Women have made significant gains in these areas through the influence of feminism, a critical school of thought and a revolutionary re-valuation of society and the roles it has reserved for females. Feminism has also raised gender politics to the highest pedestal of social discourse in education, the media, politics, language, and indeed, every human endeavour.

Objectives of the study

The aim of this study is to determine the gender political consciousness of EST students and also determine whether there are differences in the use of English between males and females in the group.

Statement of the Research Problem

Issues of gender are prominent in many aspects of daily existence of modern humans; especially in social relations and communications. The Department of English Studies, University of Port Harcourt has responded to the need of undergraduate students of the Department to function socially and communicate effectively by creating courses that create awareness of gender politics and its impact on effective social relations and effective communications. These courses are:

1. EST 126.2: Language & Society
2. EST 216.2: Varieties of English
3. EST 310.2: Sociolinguistics
4. EST 417.1: Literary Theory & Criticism

However, once the students obtain pass grades in these courses, no one has undertaken to evaluate the learning outcome of the courses. The research problem therefore is to provide an essential feedback on the student's learning by determining whether these courses succeeded in raising their awareness on gender politics.

Research Questions

1. Do male and female EST students speak differently in the process of communication?
2. Does gender affect interaction among male and female EST students?
3. Are the participants conscious of issues of gender politics?
4. Did the four EST courses listed in this study contribute to this consciousness?
5. Does their passion on the issues of gender politics align with their individual gender?

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it attempted to relate instructional content to lifestyle in the English language used by male and female students of the Department of English Studies. The study provides further feedback on some courses taught in the Department and may assist curriculum designers in the development of course content.

Hypothesis

The research questions will be validated with the following three null hypotheses:

1. There is no evidence of consciousness of gender politics in the use English language by male and female EST students.
2. There is no gender-based observable differences between male and female EST students' use of English.
3. The EST courses listed in the study did not contribute to the patterns of gendered interaction by male and female EST students in the study and the participants' gender consciousness.

The Theory of Radical Feminism

Radical Feminism is a branch of the feminist movement that became prominent during the second wave of feminism in the 1960s. At this point in time, American women had won the right to vote and were working more outside of the home. In addition, the United States had gone through the sexual revolution which had lowered the pressure for people to be strictly monogamous and had given them more room for sexual expression. So, feminists found new perspectives to their agitation. These developments were boosted by the publication of Germaine Greer's *The female eunuch* and Simone de Beauvoir's *The second sex*. These two books have since become the reference points in radical feminism because they propose a militant rejection of female domination and advocated the celebration of the female experience as authentic and equal to the male experience. For instance, Greer called on females to drop the shame often associated with female experiences of sexuality, orgasm, menstruation, etc. and go ahead in celebration of self.

Feminism forces a new way of using language on society and this has raised consciousness on issues of gender inequalities not only in language studies but also in society as a whole. This is the remarkable difference between the first wave of moderate feminism and the second wave of radical feminism. Greer (1970, p. 11) observed of these two brands of feminism as follows:

The new emphasis is different. Then genteel middle-class ladies clamoured for reform, now ungentle middle-class women are calling for revolution. For many of them, the call for revolution came before the call for the liberation of women.

By these words, she proclaimed a new phase in feminism. The following are some of the manifestations of gender bias; which traditional society forces on females:

- Not paying a person an equal wage, or offering them the same benefits as other employees, because of their sex or gender.
- Treating a person, often a woman, as a sexual object (objectification)
- Using offensive language or making offensive jokes based on someone's sex or gender

- Only allowing one sex to participate in certain activities such as sports, military service, positions in the clergy, traditional leadership, Etc.
- Denying a person access to education because of their sex or gender
- Creating an environment where one gender feels unsafe or uncomfortable
- Not supporting girls' sports teams, the same way support is given to equivalent boys' sports teams.

Radical feminism suits this study as a framework because the feminist rejection of the language of traditional society is radical in nature. The researchers also believe that the success of this goal (and it is succeeding) will mark a landmark achievement for radical feminism because many critics gave it little chance few decades ago. Since language is the core of human thought and understanding, gender equality in language will usher in the successful removal of female biases and sustain the equality in future generations.

Literature Review

Feminism is a movement for a change of the traditional attitude of male dominance of women in society. The domination of women is prominent in the cultural practices of diverse societies in which females are generally assigned inferiority and insignificance in cultural values. Females were treated as the objects in several social norms such as relationships, marriage, politics, education, religion, etc. and were not accorded equal rights with their male counterparts. Consequently, many societies harbour several forms of suppressive inequalities (such as unequal marital relationships, the denial of political, religious, and educational rights, etc.) against women. According to Ahaotu, Onuagha, and Ibrahim (2013, p. 30):

The concept of feminism has evolved into one of the most popular tools of contemporary literary criticism. Although the concept is predominantly treated more as a movement than as a theory of criticism, its influence on literary criticism is so far-reaching that popular texts of the pre-feminist era are re-evaluated for conformity to feminist critical canons. Presently, male writers strive to achieve a balance in gender delineation of literary characters, otherwise, such writers risk being vilified as the stereotypical malevolent masculinists.

They further explained that the suppression of females was generally entrenched in social practices and manifested in the following inequalities:

- Female children were not sent to school like their male counterparts but were rather kept at home to serve domestic functions until they are old enough to marry and continue the cycle domestic chores and childbearing. Some female children were married off early or sold outright to raise money for the education or marriage of preferred male children.
- In Africa, the traditional institution of marriage subjugated women further and treated them as appendages to their better male spouses through female circumcision, polygamy, widowhood practices, and other anti-feminist traditions. Some of these practices exist till date: polygamy is still prestigious while polyandry is still a taboo; females are still circumcised to tame their libido while male circumcision is a religious/cosmetic beautification and both virility and sexual prowess are celebrated virtues in males; African widows still undergo dehumanizing cultural practices while African widowers do not undergo any deprivations

- Gender discrimination also manifested in the evils of slave trade when female slaves sold for far less than the value of their male counterparts.
- In religious politics, women are even more rigidly subjugated and barred from either joining the mainstream priesthood or fully exploring their capabilities to the goal of rising to the zenith of leadership. Early women liberation movements were largely focused on the following general areas:
 - Eradication of discrimination in employment opportunities.
 - Eradication of discrimination in educational/professional opportunities.
 - An end to the use of women as sex objects of men.

A more radical brand of feminism developed in the 1960s and expanded the frontiers of feminist demands to include marriage and child-bearing rights. The feminists of this era initiated 'radical' demands: that child-bearing should be made optional in marriages and that female individual identity must be treated as equal and alternative to the male identity. Contemporary feminist schools of thought include Moderationists, Accommodationists, and Western Radicals. All shades of feminism are united in their attack on the traditional structures of patriarchy, such as cultural practices and language.

Akande (2002) identified a dichotomy between Western and Southern feminist, among other differences in the feminist movement. She buttressed her argument on the existential reality of hierarchy in social, political, economic, and religious interactions and considered that it would be 'It would then be euphoric to postulate of a future of total equality amongst all peoples of different cultures, gender, race and religions whether intra or internationally, in the domestic and in the public domain.' (n.p). Thorne and Henley (1975) argued that male dominance has shaped the meaning of words referring to both females and males; words associated with males more often have positive connotations and they convey notion of power and leadership than female words, which are more often negative, conveying weakness, inferiority, immaturity, and irrelevance.

Unlike other forms of feminism that viewed power as something positive as long as it was evenly distributed, radical feminists believed that power was mostly something experienced in a dual system of domination and subordination, with one party always experiencing oppression. The patriarchal system was an outrage to radical feminists, and as a result, they tended to be militant with their efforts, calling for direct action against patriarchy and male supremacy. They oppose any institution, events, and systems that they feel supports the oppression of females. English language is one such systems that receive attacks from radical feminists. They want the language to be unbiased.

The goal of feminists such as Greer is a radical departure from the old ways of male dominance of women and the tool to achieve this is the dismantling of masculine structures, such as culture and language. In Greer's (1970, pp. 12) words:

Female sexuality has always been a fascinating topic; this discussion of it attempts to show how female sexuality has been masked and deformed by most observers, and never more so than in our own time. The conformation of the female has already been described in terms of a particular type of conditioning, and now the specific character of that conditioning begins to emerge. What happens is that the female is considered as a sexual object for the use and appreciation of other sexual beings, men. Her sexuality is both denied and misrepresented by being identified as passivity. The vagina is obliterated from

the imagery of femininity in the same way that the signs of independence and vigour in the rest of her body are suppressed. The characteristics that are praised and rewarded are those of the castrate – timidity, plumpness, languor, delicacy and preciousness. Body ends with a look at the way in which female reproduction is thought to influence the whole organism in the operations of the Wicked Womb, source of hysteria, menstrual depression, weakness, and unfitness for any sustained enterprise.

This view has influenced many other feminists, some of whom have revolted against established models of beauty, marriage, family, virtue, motherhood, etiquette, language/expression, etc., as forms of the general agitation against gender inequality.

Sargın, and Koşaner (2016) investigated the features that make the speech of Turkish male homosexuals distinctive from the speech of Turkish male and female heterosexual speech. They cited Medhurst's (2002, pp. 314-315) view that many male to female transsexuals, transvestites and homosexuals speak in a significantly different way from heterosexual males and females, and their exaggerated manner of speech with a concern to sound like a woman makes them sound more distinct than either normal male or female speech. Their study concluded that pitch and range/intonation are the primary features that mark the speech of Turkish male homosexuals as distinctive from the speech of Turkish male and female heterosexuals.

Studies focused on the effect of gender on the use of language have generally concluded that there are various levels of differences between male and female use of language. Some of the popular studies and their findings are:

1. Jespersen (1922/1949), noted that female speech is more conservative and indirect than male speech; which tend to be coarse and profane.
2. Reik (1954); Labov (1966); Levine & Crockett (1966); Trudgill (1972); Kramer (1974) have suggested that men use more slang words and vulgar expressions than women.
3. Lakoff (1973) observed that men use stronger expletives while women use weaker or softer profanity.

Haas (1979, p. 616) summarized many of the distinctions of male and female use of English in the following words:

Male speech and female speech have been observed to differ in their form, topic, content, and use. Early writers were largely introspective in their analyses; more recent work has begun to provide empirical evidence. Men may be more loquacious and directive; they use more nonstandard forms, talk more about sports, money, and business, and more frequently refer to time, space, quantity, destructive action, perceptual attributes, physical movements, and objects. Women are often more supportive, polite, and expressive, talk more about home and family, and use more words implying feeling, evaluation, interpretation, and psychological state. A comprehensive theory of "genderlect" must include information about linguistic features under a multiplicity of conditions.

However, Haas' views above and many of the findings of the studies reviewed about male and female use of language, especially the use of English language, have been affected by the changes both in gender political consciousness and its impact on language use. For instance, 'talk more about sports, money, and business' can hardly suffice as an exclusive male subject in this year, 2020! Sports and business are probably as much a male affair as it is a female

affair. And millennial females are freer with the four-letter taboo word than the older generation of females.

Methodology

The study is designed to be a quasi-experimental survey and it combined qualitative and quantitative principles of investigation. The data drawn for analysis are verbal responses; which the researchers converted to figures and analyzed against the background of the speech acts of the participants. Seven pre-determined questions and other follow-up questions that arose in the course of the discussions were used in the study.

The study targeted the entire 83 final year undergraduate students of the Department of English Studies, University of Port Harcourt in the 2016/2017 academic session. Only final year students were chosen because they had completed the four courses covered in the study.

The population sample was selected through a controlled random sampling procedure; which enabled the researchers to observe the principles of equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI). The researchers pre-selected ten volunteer respondents (5 female and 5 male) to participate in the discussions at each of the three interview events of the study. Thus, a sample population of thirty students participated in this study. In line with requirements of EDI, both male and female genders had 15 participants in the study.

The focus group discussions (FGD) method was adopted in this study. Three loosely structured group interviews were conducted by the researchers and these enabled them to adjust interview content and also to interview several respondents systematically and simultaneously. Each group discussion was moderated at a different time by the researchers, who carefully took notes on proceedings. The researchers introduced lead questions/discussion points and encouraged the participants to freely express their views on the topics. The discussions are geared towards a group position point; which the researchers record as well as observe the dynamics of the interaction.

The data was analyzed with Ritchie and Spencer's "framework analysis" (Rabiee, 2004, p. 657); which allowed opinions to emerge both from research questions and from the narratives of research participants. The observations of the researchers also formed a crucial part of analytical instruments. Data were presented in tables and analyzed with simple percentages and significant ratios. The researchers classified and analyzed the data by relating them to established indices of gender-power dynamics.

Data Presentation

The information obtained from FGDs is presented in the table 1 below.

Table 1: Result of FGD with Respondents

S/N	Lead Question	Summarized Findings
1	Do male and female students of the Department use different speech patterns?	Participants unanimously agreed that there are significant differences
2	At which point of your education and socialization did you most develop gender political consciousness?	Majority of the participants agreed that the most significant development occurred in the course of their university education.
3	What factors are responsible for the differences in the speech patterns of male students of the Department?	Majority of the participants listed: socialization, male dominance, culture, and social inequality.

4	What specific features of cross gender interaction would you most like to change?	Majority of the participants listed: socialization, male dominance, culture, and social inequality.
5	What features most characterize the speech of female/male students of the Department?	Participants agreed that female speech is characterized by indirectness, and is therefore apologetic and flowery; while male speech is characterized by vulgarity, directness, and assertiveness.
6	Would you support the male/female gender on just any issues just because you belong to them?	Participant opinion on this varied significantly between agreement and modification.
7	What specific factors enabled you to develop this highest level of consciousness?	The participants listed the gender-related courses they offered, the various forms of media, and the activities of feminists and women groups as top factors that enabled them attain the highest level of gender political consciousness.

Data Analysis

The data presented above are analysed in the following individual tables.

Table 2

S/N	Lead Question	Number. of Participants	Male	Female	Yes	No
1	Do male and female students of EST Department use different speech patterns?	30	15	15	30	0
2	Did you develop your highest gender political consciousness in the university?	30	13	13	26	4

From the table above, the 10 student participants in each of the three panels were asked if male and female students use different speech patterns during conversation. The participants in the groups unanimously agreed that there are differences in the patterns of male and female students' use of English in the Department of English Studies, University of Port Harcourt. However, the participants shared different opinions on the extent of the differences; which views ranged from insignificant to significant. Their unanimous agreement answered in the affirmative, our research question (1) [Do male and female EST students speak differently in the process of communication?]. The study affirms that male and female students of the Department of English Studies, University of Port Harcourt use English differently.

When the participants had unanimously agreed that the speech patterns of male and female students of the Department of English Studies, University of Port Harcourt are different, the researchers asked them follow-up questions on their awareness of gender politics and they all answered in the affirmative. The researchers proceeded to ask them whether they developed the awareness before they were admitted to the university or in the course of their studies in the

university. 26 participants, representing 86% of the respondents, indicated that they attained their highest level of gender political consciousness in the university; while 4 participants, representing 14% of the respondents, indicated that they were already active on gender issues before their university admission. This result from item 2 on the table above provided positive answers to our research question (4): Did the four EST courses listed in this study contribute to this consciousness? It indicated that the learning outcome of the four EST courses listed in this study is positive: the students are significantly conscious of gender issues and are actively engaged in strengthening gender political manifestation and awareness. While this discussion was going on, we observed that male students interrupted one another and female students more than the female students did. When the argument became intense, many female participants became reticent while the male participants tend to become more excited and argumentative at that point.

Table 3

S/N	Lead Question	Number of Participants	Male	Female	Male Dominance	Culture	Social Inequality	Religion
3	What factors are responsible for the differences in the speech patterns of male students of the Department? (Socialization, male dominance, culture, and social inequality.)	30	15	15	9	14	5	2
4	What specific features of cross gender interaction would you most like to change?	30	15	15	16	8	3	3

The data in the table above shows that the participants were given some options of factors which could be responsible for the difference in male and female speech patterns. These factors include: male dominance, culture, social inequality and religion. From the table, out of the 30 participants selected for this study, 9 participants (30%) agree that male dominance is the major factor, 14 participants (47%) agree that culture is the main contributing factor, 5 participants (17%) agreed that social inequality is the main factor, while 2 participants (7%) accepted religion as a major factor of the differences in male and female use of English. From table 3, we can deduce that culture is the most significant factor that contributes to the differences in the speech pattern of male and female students in the Department of English Studies, University of Port Harcourt.

From the table, we also identified that respondents would most like to eliminate male dominance in the cross-gender interactions of male and female students of the Department of English Studies, University of Port Harcourt. Male dominance polled 53% of overall responses on item 4 on Table 3 to emerge the cross-gender feature of English that respondents most desire to eliminate. Culture polled 27% to occupy the second position. Both religion and social inequality polled 10% each and became the least significant of the features that respondents desired to change. The table above provided an answer to our research question 2 which sought to identify the factors that contribute to the differences in the speech patterns of male and female

students of the Department of English Studies, University of Port Harcourt. These results answer research question 2 (Does gender affect interaction among male and female EST students?) in the affirmative.

It was observed that male participants were still more talkative and cared little about interrupting others. Yielding the floor to other panelists was a tug of war for male participants, who frequently interrupted others, seized the floor, and tried to keep it as long as they could.

Table 4

S/N	Lead Question	Number of Participants	Indirectness/group non-allegiance	Directness/group allegiance
5	What features most characterize the speech of female/male students of the Department?	30 Male 15 Female 15	12 females and 2 males voted that they would be careful and indirect when talking about sensitive issues.	3 females and 13 males voted that they would be direct and not careful despite the subject.
6	Would you support the male/female gender on just any issues just because you belong to them?	30 Male 15 Female 15	9 males and 6 females will consider the issue before supporting their gender.	9 females and 6 males will certainly support their gender on any issue

In order to vary the pattern of interaction, the participants were not asked to make direct choices of options in the above questions. Rather, they were first engaged in a discussion of the two questions and later vote for one of the pair of options; while the researchers listened attentively and took notes that enabled them to identify the features presented in the table above. In response to item 5 on Table 4 above. 14 respondents comprising 12 females and 2 males or a percentile of 47 preferred indirectness and its apologetic, flowery, and euphemistic sub-components. The majority of these respondents are females. On the other hand, 16 respondents (53%) comprising 13 males and 3 females opted for directness in speech with its characteristics of vulgarity, assertiveness, and slanginess. From the discussion, we were able to identify that male speech is authoritative, carefree, direct and assertive. The authoritative nature of male speech was obvious as the male participants in the discourse tended to use imperative sentences and appeared to be self-confident. The male participants also made use of vulgar terms during the discussion and were far more interruptive of themselves and the female students alike during the panel discussion. Male speech was noted to be direct as the male participants bluntly expressed their views without euphemizing it. Their speech was also noted to be assertive as they were too confident (and often boastful) in giving opinions without considering if they may be wrong.

The researchers steered the discussion to issues of sex and sexuality (such as: Are you in a sexual relationship? What do males want from females in a relationship? What types of sexually transmitted diseases do you know and how does each manifest? Etc.) and discovered that the female speech pattern is euphemistic. Euphemism is a figure of speech which uses pleasant expressions to refer to unpleasant things or uses a less offensive expression to refer to taboo words or offensive expression, for instance, using “kick bucket” to refer to death. At this stage of the discussion, the female students became generally bashful while the male students easily and explicitly discussed the subject of sex and sexuality. The male participants tended to refer to sex organs and sexual activities more directly than the females who generally preferred

euphemisms for the same organs and activities. Such euphemisms include: ‘cucumber’, ‘thing’, and ‘banana’ for the male phallus.

In response to item 6 on table 4, the panel was sharply divided into two equal groups. 15 participants (50%) indicated that they would support their gender on all issues while the remaining 15 participants (50%) indicated that they would first consider the issue at stake and what is logical before deciding to support any group. Interestingly, each of these two groups has male and female participants: 9 males (60% of overall male study population) and 6 females (20% of overall female study population) would not join a gender band wagon while 9 females (60% of overall female study population) and 6 males (20% of overall male study population) would gladly join a gender band wagon in any situation. This result indicated that male students are nonchalant and less committed to group interest while female students are more active in gender politics. This response has answered our research question 5 (Does their passion on the issues of gender politics align with their individual gender?) in the negative.

Table 5

S/N	Lead Question	Number of Participants	Gender – based courses	Feminist & women group activities	Various forms of the media
7	What specific factors enabled you to develop this highest level of consciousness?	30 Females 15 Males 15	23	5	2

In their responses to item 7 on Table 5, the participants overwhelmingly chose the gender related courses they undertook in the Department as the major source of their gender political awareness. 23 participants (77%) indicated that gender related departmental courses raised their gender political awareness to its highest levels. ‘Feminist and women group activities’ was the major motivating factor for 5 participants (17%), while ‘various forms of the media’ motivated 2 participants (7%) to their highest levels of gender political awareness. These responses further answer research question 4: Are the participants conscious of issues of gender politics? It reiterated the contributions of the EST courses to the gender political consciousness of the participants.

Test of Hypotheses

The research questions tested in the analysis were applied to the three null hypotheses to check the validity of the findings. The first research question (Do male and female EST students speak differently in the process of communication?) was answered in the affirmative with the data and analysis presented on Table 2. The finding was a unanimous agreement by participants that differences exist between the use of English of male and female EST students. Item 4 on Table 3 also indicated that all the respondents identified 4 specific causes of the differences and a 47% majority chose ‘Male dominance’ as the factor that they would most like to eliminate. These results disprove Null Hypothesis 2; which stated that ‘There are no observable gender-based differences between male and female EST students’ use of English’. Therefore, there are gender-based differences in the use of English between the participants.

The result from item 2 on Table 2 provided positive answers to our research question (3): Are the participants conscious of issues of gender politics? An overwhelming 86% of the respondents indicated that they attained much of their gender political consciousness in the course of studying the four listed courses at the Department. Similarly, item 7 on Table 5 elicited 77% affirmative answers from participants that claimed that the gender related EST courses were the major factors responsible for their high-level gender political consciousness. This result indicated that the learning outcome of the four EST courses listed in this study is positive and that they raised the students' awareness of gender politics; and so, both Null Hypotheses 1 (There is no evidence of consciousness of gender politics in the use English language by male and female EST students.) and 3 (The EST courses listed in the study did not contribute to the patterns of gendered interaction by male and female EST students in the study and the participants' gender consciousness.) are rejected and their alternatives are accepted. The EST students in the study are consciously and actively engaged in gender politics and the listed courses significantly boosted the students' gender political consciousness.

All three null hypotheses are therefore rejected and their alternatives are accepted to validate the findings of this study.

Summary

The participants demonstrated significant awareness of gender politics and generally expressed the view that male students tend to speak as they deem fit and also use words that females would consider indecent. In contrast, females are socialized into timidity and females who attempt to go against the roles ascribed to them by the society are often regarded as social misfits or lacking good upbringing. To buttress her view on this subject, a participant cited a community in Obubra, Cross River State, Nigeria, where she alleged that although boys and girls grow up speaking the same patterns of their local language, they are socialized into using significantly different forms of expression when they become adult men and women.

During the discussion, the researchers observed some of the features that earlier researchers had identified as characteristics of female speech and these include: apologetic, flowery and euphemistic expressions. The female students often spoke as though they were apologizing for some unknown errors or that they needed permission to take turns in cross-gender communication. Their speech is also characterized by flowery terms through their preponderant use of modifiers such as adverbs and adjectives. However, these adjectives help to beautify the speech of the female students and in the follow up questions, participants agreed that female students are more proficient speakers of English than their male counterparts.

Conclusion

The study is a response to the debate on the asymmetric nature of the use of English between male and female speakers of the language. Feminists have made significant progress in their commitment to attain equality for all humans without prejudice to whether they are males or females. This study exploited Radical Feminism and the highlight it brought on dismantling masculinizing elements of language as a basis for the investigation of the gender political consciousness and variation in the speech of male and female students of the University of Port Harcourt. Student participants in the FGD generally agreed that differences exist in the English language used by male and female students of Uniport. They also agreed that the differences are the result factors such as socialization, religion, personal choices, male dominance, and culture while the researchers observed differences between male and female participants in the FGD in discourse strategies such as: turn-taking, lexical choices, use of minimal responses, use of questions, interruptions, loud and aggressive arguments, politeness, and the use of

imperatives. Based on this compelling evidence, our observations, and the majority views expressed by participants, we sum up that there are differences in patterns of use of English between the two genders sampled in the study and that the roles the society has ascribed to men and women are responsible for the differences in speech patterns of male and female students of the Department of English Studies, University of Port Harcourt. Society is responsible for socialization into masculinity and femininity; masculinity is the role that society expects males to fulfil while femininity refers to the roles society reserves for females. We sum up also that the participants are not only conscious of gender issues but also active participants in gender politics; which activism was developed by the gender-based courses they undertook in the Department of English Studies, University of Port Harcourt, Port Harcourt, Nigeria.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusion presented above, the researchers make the following recommendations:

1. Gender-based courses offered in the Department should emphasize all of gender equality diversity, inclusion, and mutual respect of the human species. All forms of discrimination, such as racial, religious, ethnic, and cultural biases, should be integrated into the commendable feminist movement to restructure a society that is inherently structured on inequalities and oppression of segments of its population. The successes of the feminist movement will avail little to women if they are still victims in other strata of the oppressed; such as victims of racism, ethnicity, fanaticism, and cultural biases.
2. A general studies course in gender politics should be created and placed at the same pedestal as other General Studies Courses for all undergraduates of the University of Port Harcourt. Students in other departments of the University ought to learn the important life skills presented in the subject in order to function effectively in contemporary society. Such a course would significantly enhance their social and communicative skills.

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