

LANGUAGE STUDY

Language Use and Gender Positioning Among the Swazi

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Abstract

This article discusses some of the linguistic usage and the question of gender positioning within Swazi socio-cultural setting. It observes that the results of this manifests itself even today, where language use and cultural values cannot be said to be equal between women and men. We also notice that the use of language differentially between men and women is embedded within Swazi cultural tradition and customs. This practice is part of the inherent patriarchal practices that obtain in this region, such as marriage within customary law, initiation rites, family naming, etc.

The conclusion questions whether or not, given the present situation, language use and inequality in employment practices should evolve and change for equality for all. Basically, what is being asked is whether it is desirable to change language practice with its imported values and syncretism where the implications and efforts are not yet entirely predictable. There may thus be some pressure to retain what is Swazi. This is specifically with regard to language practice and observation of pertinent socio-cultural customs. The change in beliefs and customs could be a result of urbanisation but with a slow change within society's structure itself. Language practice could only survive as long as other institutions continue to survive (Finlayson, 2002). If this happens there ought to be social stability of the patriarchal ordering which is not essentially influenced by post-modernist and feminist perspective demands.

In this way the continued use of sexist language and classism within Swazi society becomes questionable and a highly contentious issue where influential citizens have knowledge of liberation linguistics and cultural awareness.

Introduction

This article argues that language and gender positioning in terms of classism are essentially deep-rooted within Swazi socio-cultural practices where the expression of the discourse that prevails for females, along with lesser positions that are given to them amounts to a denigration of their status and that this discourse is generally informed by a culture of patriarchy. The contention, therefore, is that there are issues of differential use of language between men and women, where sexism and classism have become part of society's overall practice where linguicism¹ is endemic.

The conclusion observes that while there is some change with regard to toning down the language, it nonetheless, questions whether or not other forms of downgrading women's role and positions ought to change to result in equality in gender positioning and classism in general. This might be the result of the *ukungena* custom, which refers to inheriting a deceased's wife. And it is also the man that inherits and not the other way round.

Theoretical framework

Following on a social constructive perspective use, differential language, gender and sex are viewed as a socially development phenomena. Wodak (1999b) is of the view that these operate in the presence and influence of a set of environments, where there are no singular traits that define masculinity for men or one set of traits that define femininity for women. This is the view of sexual ideology, which serves to reify the inequality that exists between men and women.

This is a feminist-modernist approach, which gives a perspective where the two concepts are used as rationale for language use and classism in the present societies with all the cultural awareness. What seems to be clearly observed is that there is considerable oppressive use of language, education, economic, social and moral discrimination against women. The argument, therefore, is that consideration in differential treatment subjects women to lesser positions than men, first as a result of society's language which is essentially sexist and one that has been institutionalised through patriarchy and second that this oppression also manifests itself in various facets of classism in society's structures.

Such a critique in the end calls for the eradication of all the forms of degradation and dehumanisation to arrive at some form of non-sexist language and equality and gender positioning. Thus the feminist and post-modernist approach are essentially concerned with the politics of identity

¹ This refers to language racism or its hegemonic practice where super ideologies and structures are used by a dominant group to dominate and undermine the marginalised group.

and subjectivity, both of which reject dualism. It could be argued that such a view has its roots in the west on language use and which also extends to forms of institutionalised classist tendencies in the work place.

Linguistic habits are a reflection and perception of ideas, which have covert significance in a given culture. In Swazi culture, like in other forms of language use in Southern Africa, the discourse between men and women reveals different attitudes and assumptions, which manifestly testify the deep-rootedness of sexism. The position that this article takes is that such forms of expression are essentially embedded in socio-cultural traditions and customs of these respective societies.

The feminist-modernist view is that this form of sexism refers to “discrimination within a social system on the basis of sexual membership” (Wodak, 1997:07). Men and women are, therefore, in a binary opposition, where the relationship is unequal or non-egalitarian but rather hierarchical. This places men above women, largely following such a hierarchical pecking order. This conception of gender positioning with its assumptions in binary sexuality is rejected by feminists, whose view is that such a description is not immutable. Their argument is that such traits, which are assigned by cultural impositions, or constructs ought to be altered.

It bears noting that this might result in a conflict between western and typical African cultural thinking and views. According to feminist epistemology these two theories relate to the contention on language use and gender categories in the feminist belief or argument that such language use and classism is a result of social-cultural statuses which have been imposed on a society by patriarchal dominance, making them appear as natural whereas they are basically not. The central focus is on language use as a tool of an instituted patriarchal society. Through language use all other forms of subjugate women have become institutionalised by a society’s decree that women become discriminated, incapacitated and denigrated. The language created and instituted thus becomes consciously or unconsciously encoded into a society’s sexist language, and its users perceive it as only normal and cultural. It is these linguistic practices which have tended to reinforce and naturalise the divisions that we see between men and women on account that they have been largely entrenched in patriarchy and endocentrism or in a world that is viewed as male-dominated. Ultimately, it is not, in the case of this discussion, that Swazi males are sexist but that siSwati language is sexist like other Southern African languages generally and, therefore, that such languages are biased towards male and largely against females.

The language of respect of women (*Isihlonipho sabafazi*)

In Finlayson’s (2002) terms, the word *hlonipha* describes,

customs between relations-in-law, and is generally but not exclusively applied to the female sex, who, when married, are not allowed to pronounce or use words which do not have their principal syllables or any part of the syllable of the names of their chief's or husband's relations, especially their father-in-law; they must keep at a distance from the latter. Hence they have the habit of inventing names for these persons.
(Kropf and Godfrey, 1915 in Finlayson, 2002)

Shaka, a well-known Zulu king, exhibited the *hlonipha* language among other Nguni languages. After a long travel without finding any drinking water, Shaka is said to have arrived at a well-watered place. He wished to name it *amanzi amnandi* (meaning fresh or pleasant water). However, his mother's name having been Nandi and thus out of respect for her, he had to name the place *nandi* as part of the qualificative. He thus called it *amanzimtoti*, where *toti* replaced *nandi*. The syllabic avoidance is rare among men and research has shown that there are indeed exceptional cases where men do *hlonipha*. This is one instance where Nguni-speaking men also do show this form of linguistic custom. In its broadest sense the *hlonipha* custom of respect is displayed as in the headscarf or the avoidance of certain areas of the homestead.

Customarily, a daughter-in-law is expected to be responsible for her mother-in-law even more than to her husband. In turn, the mother-in-law is to protect her if any misconduct would result in the invocation of the *thuleka* custom. Here the daughter-in-law would return to her parents, until a fine, *uswazi* was paid for her. This was some kind of penitence and this kind of linguistic and customary control could be reviewed as a mark of dominance within the Swazi or indeed any other Nguni patriarchal family, where customs are specifically tailored to maintain overall male power, with women as subordinates of an inferior status. This is maintained through a code of behaviour taught to girls and young wives upon arrival in the husband's home. It is thus indexical of the wife's inferior position through language code. The young wife has to learn to use to her in-laws, which is reinforced by the daily practice. Women learn to acquire this language as young girls through initiation rites and also when they enter the homes of the husbands. The language thus symbolizes the power of the *hlonipha* language and custom.

In the coining of new words that depart from core words, it is not the name of the device that attracts attention but rather the name as a device that attracts the attention of its bearer and what it focuses on the person who is uttering the name (Finlayson, 2002:280). Thus the avoidance linguistic practice occurs within the *hlonipha* language practice. There is here a high incidence of unique names and where such words are derived from ordinary

words of the language. Within the Nguni society the purpose of avoidance language is not to focus attention on the husband or the ancestors, as these are male dominated concerns or reserved rights for men alone generally.

Our analysis of Finalyson's (2002) perspective is that this is an ideological construct among Nguni languages. Nguni languages include isiZulu, isiXhosa and isiNdebele and siSwati. Cross-border languages spoken in South Africa and Zimbabwe are isiNdebele and siSwati. The only indigenous language spoken in Swaziland is siSwati. Finlayson (2002) essentially questions whether the socio-cultural dimension of language should still be held or not. This is whether there should be linguistic change or not. She views in this culture a distinct hierarchy in the social system, which has a deleterious effect on the individual's rights and duties, privileges and obligations. She terms the *hlonipha* culture as 'the conscious avoidance in the woman's everyday speech of the syllables occurring in the family names of the husband' (Finlayson, 2002: 289-283). In this way she considers this socio-cultural view as a mark of dominance by male members of the family. The power dynamics are such that males tailor customs in order to maintain power for themselves. For example, she explains that a daughter in-law is made conscious of her new state. What seems to be the underlying factor in this system is the patriarchal gender relations that set a woman as the *other*. Thus if a daughter in-law were to disobey such rules, she might be sent home and would have to return to her husband's home with a gift of some sort in penitence as mentioned earlier. This is in effect a specific mode of patriarchal organisation, which culminates in the objectification of women by treating them as commodities.

The picture given above here should be understood within the context of the structure and functioning of the power relations in a typical traditional Swazi society. Finalyson's (2002) observation is that a new era of modernisation has a mitigating effect on women's marginal location within various structures of a traditional patriarchal domination. This culture of modernity or 'modernisation' has a globalisation effect. This relates to the intensification of the world's social relations which link distant localities in such a way that what happens locally becomes shaped by events that take place miles away (Giddens, 1987). In this regard, the evolution of *hlonipha* culture reveals the operation of patriarchal control, which in the modern global view is an oppressive gender hierarchy in which men are comparatively privileged than women. In effect then a Swazi woman, like most Nguni women is traditionally bound, domesticated and family-oriented (Mohanty, 1993:199). We could thus view the Swazi culture as a patriarchal category that is articulated as a form of control over women and which impinges upon their rights as franchised citizens.

We need to note that while this may well be a contested ideological and political terrain it is predicated on the Swazi institution of its customs that keep this culture bound by its particular traditional views of its ethnic

communities. Those who argue that this is still an appropriate linguistic culturally observed custom, may seem, in the eyes of upwardly mobile Swazi to be engaging in a propagation and reinforcement of enslaving patriarchal norms. This tends to permit relations of exploitation and domination that exist in this society, not just between individuals but also among populations of individuals. More gender politics may seem to be necessary to transform patriarchal views, since as a linguistic system the practice of this socio-cultural and language use only continues to render women susceptible to *othering* practices as deemed fit by men and denies women an affirming identity.

Examples of Swazi sexist language that denigrates the status of women

What is clearly notable in siSwati is that morphologically siSwati words are largely derivatives of male-specific references. These include *umfelwa* (a widower) *indvodza* (a man). The female-specific references are formed by adding *-kati* to their corresponding male specific words.

It is to be noted from the two words given above that there is no siSwati word for a widow presupposing that there are no widows in Swazi society, which is obviously not the case. A society's attitudes largely express its belief system through its use of language. The language used reflects the views and values of a given society and there is no language that is essentially bad. While one word could have a positive connotation another word with identical linguistic meaning could convey negative connotation. (Fromkin and Rodman, 1993). In Southern Rhodesia, later on Rhodesia, under Ian Smith's Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) the word 'terrorist' was used by his regime while the word 'freedom fighter' was used by Black nationalists aspiring for the country's independence. Words in a language, therefore, may have different associations and express different connotations. SiSwati may use terms or words that are pejorative to women and not to men. Similarly in English a male chief executive officer could be described as 'aggressive' whereas a female one could be said to be 'pushy'.

The siSwati grammar essentially shows that nouns that 'denote men are non-derived nouns (although some have corresponding verbal forms which are back-formations), whereas most of the nouns that denote women are derived from verbs of male nominal stems' (Kunene and Mulder, 1992: 337).

As in the two examples given above the following can also be observed also from below:

- | | | |
|-----|------------------|--------|
| (i) | <i>in-dvodza</i> | 'man' |
| | <i>in-khosi</i> | 'king' |

in-nduna 'headman'
um-fo 'man/fellow/stranger'

Female derived words from male words:

- (ii) *in-dvodza-kati* 'daughter' (*in-dvodza*) 'man' plus feminine gender suffix *-kati*)
- (iii) *in-khos-at-ana* 'unmarried lady'
'*in-khosi* 'king' followed by feminine gender suffix variant *-ati* plus diminutive suffix *-ana*)
- (iv) *in-dlovu-kati/kazi* 'queen mother'
(*indlovu* 'elephant' plus feminine gender suffix *-ati*) (Kunene and Mulder, 1992: 337-338)

From the above, it follows that the subjectivity along with their identity projects women merely as male appendages. Interestingly, the same seems to apply to a western language such as English. The following example illustrate:

heir - heiress
host - hostess
mister - mistress
salesman - saleswoman
manager - manageress

It is interesting also to observe that words such as *saleswoman* and *manageress* have today disappeared in English. Women in managerial positions also wish to be called managers and salesperson, respectively. The general observation is that cultural attitudes could be construed as subordinating in that women are 'dependent creatures' and therefore lesser or secondary beings.

In terms of language connotation different words for what would commonly described as 'gossiping' between men and women are differentiated in siSwati as follows:

hebeta 'to gossip' (man)
hleba 'to gossip' (woman)

in-ganwa 'male with a lot of girl friends'
in-gwandla 'female prostitute'

The linguistic connotation is that gossiping is viewed positively among men and accepted but among women this has negative connotations, implying

that the nature of gossip is itself proper for men but certainly not for women. This sexual inequality extends to other features such as customary marriage practice, customary law, both of which mark the fabric of Swazi cultural values. The ultimate view is that Swazi society and other cultures like it are sexist in nature. Only positive values are attributed to men and where women are regarded lowly in terms of structural and linguistic ranking within Swazi society.

From the data given above, it could be argued that male words and identities are perceived and projected as 'pure,' 'stable,' 'self-containing,' while female identities are conceived of and constructed as 'impure,' 'unstable' and ever shifting. (Chaka and Mniki, 2003:29).

The language characterisation views the siSwati language for males as positive and self-presentation whereas female language is viewed as the *Other* - presentation, which is a tendency to stigmatise language referred to females where male Swati language represents the *Self* and female Swazi language – the *other*, therefore negatively depicted and constructed. This is not only tantamount to stigmatising language that refers to women but also 'devalues and slanders women, their subjectivities and identities' (Chaka and Mniki, 2003:29).

Language use as forming this *othering* discourse also characterises other Southern African languages and is, therefore, symptomatic of what would be termed as a 'theory of stigma' (Rimslead, 1997). This 'stigma theory' is largely employed by the *Self* to denigrate the *other*, in a way of stereotyping the other and thus isolating and distorting their position in society. In this way this conceals their roles with regard to how they responsibly interact among themselves and with the male sex. In the African world such have been the legitimateness and rationalisations which have continued and albeit continue to serve as the kinds of ideologies which serve to explain how societies stigmatise women's inferiority complex and justify the exercise of different types of discrimination, which remarkably, unthinkingly and unwittingly reduce women's life chances, stemming from the way that language is socio-culturally constructed (Van Dijk, 1997).

Language use has thus directly and more revealingly shown that male attitudes are not only discriminating but also serve exclusionary function. There is a caveat argument that such male-dominated language is furthermore enhanced by female language which is to some extent characterised by the way it is phonetically articulated (pronounced). The contention is that words among female users are generally in the affirmative, with hardly 'any', whereas male language has considerable number of 'nos' and the degree or complexity of syntactic clause embedding that exists.

Linguicism as an expression of language racism

In Skutnabb-Kanga's (1988) and Heugh's (1983) terms, this refers to some kind of linguistic racism in the way language is used. Language tends to be derogatory and pejorative towards women and hegemonic, with super male ideologies and structures, which reign supreme and are intended to dominate, ridicule and marginalise the other sex so that it remains a docile and marginalised group.

In practice linguicism draws its strength on totalising modernist tendencies where it views the world and language in dualistic and *othering* terms such as mind/body, man/woman, production/reproduction domination/subordination. The male sex assumes a printed position with an almost xenophobic stance (cf: Cameron, 1992). Linguistic discourse is thus characterised and thrives on the existences of cultural practices that are entrenched in patriarchal and patrimonial practices, which a society always wished to perpetuate and engender in order to retain the male supremacist and dominant linguistic practice. Its behaviour is thus related to other concepts such as colonialism, which thrived on subjugation of the colonised natives. In this case it is the women, who are dominated and linguistically subjugated, where language is employed as a tool to effect their denigration. Thus they are *othered* by an imposition of new names and are made to coin when they become married and invent new words, which will be accepted by their 'masters' the husbands.

In this way women, as well as their identity, are regulated. Their movements are also curtailed and restricted, which becomes a form of social engineering, which subjugates and *boxes* their entire life. When this is achieved they are deemed to be *hloniphaed* or using language as a form of controlling their life they are cultured within the realm of *Ubuntuism*². The latter could be interpreted as an African philosophy that is fundamentally and inherently sexist and racist in neo-classic terms.

Culture as an expression of sexism through language use

There is the contention that language use in Swazi society has tended to be used the way society is stratified. This is where women members of the Swazi society are generally denied equal group membership on the perceived gender differences based on social-cultural patriarchal terms. In social terms women are relegated to a lower class than men and through language use as a tool to effect this stratification this inequality is encoded in the grammar of siSwati (Kunene and Mulder, 1992:342). In linguistic terms this might, therefore, be an enacted and grammatically an encoded

² Ubuntuism: the fellowship of the human kind – but in this sense the concept does not accord equality between men and women.

form of racism in such patriarchal practices and therefore be viewed as an overt and covert manifestation of sexism (Van Dijk, 1997, Wodak, 1997b).

Language use in customary marriage

In the traditional sense marriage functions as a rite of passage where it is customary among Swazi, other Ngunis like the Zulu, Xhosa, Ndebele as well as other Southern African societies. The Nguni and other societies largely follow a patrimonial practice. They exclude the Cewa in Central Malawi and the Mang'anja in Southern Malawi and the Bemba in Zambia, all of which are matrimonial. Among the Swazi and other of Nguni stock it is the men who marry women and not women who marry men. This is accepted as a divine practice since time immemorial and could be similar perhaps to the feudal system in European societies. Here tradition dictated that only men marry and women get married. In linguistic terms descriptions of a matrimonial enactment assume the male taking the active form in language usage and the female the passive form and thus secondary. As a result of this in Swazi and other patrilineal cultures only men 'pay' *lobola* (dowry and pride price) to the woman's parents essentially as a token of appreciation when they marry. The other view is that the entrenchment of such marriage practices have entrenched the idea of 'ownership' of women by men, as many men view themselves as 'payers' of *lobola* to their prospective bride's family.

This has extended the feeling and practice that men have proprietary rights over the women they have married. The logical view is that since men pay *lobola* this practice is tantamount to the ownership of such married women. It also has to be observed that with the present cultural awareness of a considerable number of people, it might be argued that this is a misconstrued view to suit men's views that they own their wives, which is extended to their forceful and oppressive languages to their wives, who it is assumed are only subordinates and owned by virtue of the *lobola* that was paid to the wife's parents. A correct interpretation is that the delivery of *lobola* to the bride's parents should be viewed as a gesture or 'sign of respect to both the woman and her parents' (Mniki, 2000).

Upon marriage among the Swazi and others of the Nguni language family, a married woman is referred to as *umakoti* (a newly wed woman). This language term was created to describe her new status that refers to her and identifies her as such forever. On the other hand, a man whether newly-wed or not does not acquire such a word on any other word that refers to his new status. This practice, therefore, in linguistic terms sees and reinforces the stereotypical view that women are the ones that are affected by change and not necessarily that they are the ones that cause change. The contention is that Swazi women like others that follow similar cultural practices, view women as appendages who are gagged as a result of patriarchal hegemony. They may have to show that stability in the family is essentially their

responsibly and also if children misbehave, a finger is pointed at the wife as being ill-mannered and the cause of children's misbehaviour and not the father who is, after all, is the head of that family.

The influence and practice of customary law

There is considerable influence and practice within customary family law. This is evidently pronounced in this traditional institution of customary marriage. Within such traditional practice a Swazi man can marry multiple wives if he has the means and thus practice polygamy. However, owing to the predominant nuclear family structure among emerging middle class families and the influences of Christian and economic systems, the polygamous family practice is on the wane. It is only maintained by those who can afford it that is those with a solid economic prowess. What is important here is that as a traditional practice it remains entrenched within the hegemonic, sexist, classist and patrimonial ideologies, which to some considerable extent are still embedded in the traditional practice and thus still reinforce the stereotypical conception that women are still viewed as 'pawns' in the hands of men.

In the same vein only men can practise it and women do not have the right to practise polyandry – and are denied similar rights, which men enjoy. These include the inheritance of property and assets, which accrued from such as customary marriage. This remains a prerogative of men alone. When a woman gets married, whatever she brings falls under that man, who is the head of the family and assumes all administrative powers. The dissolution of such as customary marriage is also the sole prerogative of the husband, such as in the case of a wife being impotent and therefore cannot bear children. Marriage, on the other hand, cannot be dissolved if it is the man who is infertile and therefore cannot bear children. The wife can also not marry another man to beget children. Furthermore, adultery by a wife and not a husband also constitutes further grounds for the husband to dissolve the marriage or to divorce his wife. (Chaka and Mniki, 2003:32).

This form of secular inequality in customary marriage practice marks the general fabric of Swazi cultural and linguistic values. The ultimate view that we discern is that Swazi society and its language, like other Southern African languages are sexist in nature. This is because only positive values are culturally and linguistically attributed to men while women are invariably regarded very lowly in terms of their structural ranking and this is expressed through language..

Family naming as a form of gender positioning

Family names in African cultures bear considerable meaning unlike personal names for individuals are usually bestowed on a child based on social, historical events or some other phenomenon that reminds members

of the family or respective social group or sub-culture of what could have happened in the course of that family's history. Family names, therefore, glorify, celebrate or relive a happening within a respective family. Among the Swazi personal names are bestowed on boys only if such names capture or remind members of family traditions. This is because boys only are seen as torchbearers for their respective paternalistic families. Such names include: *Mzwakhe* (his family) *Mazipansi* (a homestead that lost its fellow men who passed away).

Girls are given pleasant names that glorify the deeds and status of their fathers only. They are thus only viewed as projections of their fathers' good efforts. Such names include *Ntombikayise* (a father's daughter). However, names such as *Ntombi* (girl), *Ntombifuthi* (yet another girl) *Ntombizodwa* (only girls) question the potency of the wife.

What is of interest is that through the naming process siSwati expresses the meanings and wishes of individual child to the family but these meanings are on the male side only. A particular observation also is that wives do not feature anywhere in the naming process, which is yet another sign of the patrimonial family set-up which totally belittles the role of wives as mothers in the naming process within the Swazi and Nguni patriarchy.

Initiation ceremonies as a form of *genderlect* behaviour

Finlayson (2002) refers to the initiation rite among the Nguni of *Umhlanga* among the *Swazi* and *ukuthamba* among the Xhosa (an induction initiation phase for girls as they are prepared for adulthood). She adds that this is required according the Nguni custom, to which Swazi society belongs. During this ritual girls are referred to as *intonjane* among the Xhosa and *umhlanga* among the Swazi and Zulu (girls being prepared for adulthood) are prepared for adulthood.

From a linguistic perspective girls acquire new words and language forms which form part of a new vocabulary as a form of *genderlect*. These words include conceptual expressions, objects and other related words, which are linguistically different from the language used by boys who go for a corresponding initiation in order for them too to reach adulthood. In this sense society's language is sexist as it is differentiated between boys and girls. Along with this acquisition of special vocabulary for these items and object is, as a form of social engineering, girls are at a certain age, not allowed to eat particular food items such as eggs and meat. Similarly women are forbidden from eating parts of slaughtered domestic animal meat such as intestines, meat from the neck and meat from a sheep's head among the Xhosa. These are perceived as constituting delicacies for men alone. Among the Zulu a married woman is not allowed to step foot in a kraal. This only indicates the regulation of women, of what they may do and not do but the same does not apply to men. In other words foods that are taboo to women are not taboo to men. While a husband is required to be given

meat or eggs to eat a wife and her children ought to have sour milk and possibly beans but certainly not eggs.

The above description of the differential treatment between boys and girls in terms of vocabulary acquisition at puberty stage for girls acts as a form of primary discriminatory socialisation mechanisms through which boys and girls are groomed and inducted into gender-specific cultural and social roles. (Chaka and Mniki, 2003:34).

Observation

In the foregoing discussion we observe anomalies between men and women, boys and girls from a linguistic perspective and also from the way they are socially and culturally discriminated. It is clear that there is inequality between the two sexes. Swazi society, like other Nguni societies as well as other societies in Southern Africa could be described as linguistic and patriarchal but perhaps not essentially retrogressive as these cultures might be analysed through western eyes. Surely, the forms of linguistic and cultural forms of behaviour are insensitive. They stigmatise the women folk through language use and there is, therefore, inequality in gender positioning between men and women.

The argument that post-colonial feminists advance is that such an approach ought not to be retained. Society should evolve, change and redress the social imbalances and do away with a linguistic practices in order to arrive at some form of equal language practice. Other forms of relegating women to a secondary and subordinate status equally ought to be dismantled.

With regard to English, considerable strides have been made particularly in the United States of American and in Britain to change the way language is used between men and women and arrive at liberation linguistics. Changes in vocabulary use act as a vanguard for the ultimate change in gender positioning culturally and particularly in the work place as well. We would consider the move from old words to the present words, where old words essentially restricted certain professions to men only. The argument through vocabulary change means that women could also occupy these professions today.

Old	new
Policeman	police officer
Fireman	fire officer
Chairman	chair person
Manpower department	human resources department

From the words given above we observe above that the new category has neutral words, which do not particularise sex. This reflects a post-

modernist worldview. There might be examples of Swazi society where it adopts neutral words to accommodate both sexes as well.

The issue, therefore, seems to be for a reconceptualisation of a new ideology to avoid the patriarchal maintenance of these cultural practices. It needs to be noted, however, that such a reconceptualisation may not be a simplistic evolution as this could only mean that such a change and dominance might be viewed by some as essentially a change in the power structure of a society culturally. While liberation linguistics might be a welcome move towards empowering women to arrive at equality with men in the work place and thus arrive at a socially responsible culture, this might only cause social-cultural upheavals. In the end this might be extending a handshake to go beyond the elbow, to use Achebe's language. Such a non-genderised society might be described as 'unSwazi' by non-feminist protagonists as well as others who do not share such as post-modernist feminist view. There is nothing inherently immoral in language change since all living languages change anyway. Cultural diffusion is also allowed in today's global village where there seems to be a melting pot of different and various cultures. However, others might argue that every respective culture ought to have its own specific identity and polity which it defines as its own identified culture with its own specific cultural values, without necessarily adulterating it with foreign ideas for the mere sake of there being a universal culture. Such non-post modernists would maintain that the wholesale giving up of what they see as their own cultural values would only render their cultures rootless without identity. However, unity could still be achieved in a diversity of cultural values through cultural diffusion to arrive at a harmonious life.

Concluding remarks

This discussion has attempted to present Swazi views, first from a language use perspective. Second, the discussion has also presented Swazi society's attitude in gender positioning as they relate to how social cultural values subordinate women to a lower status. The view is that women are accorded a low status and are dominated by men. These cultural values are reflected and grammatised in the siSwati language.

The article has, however, observed that patriarchal views are shifting towards some form of equality between men and women which would, hopefully, in the end, result in some marked change in the interplay between linguistic and cultural factors with regard to gender positioning in Swazi society. Such development towards a language shift for there to be equality between men and women is a welcome development, as long as this does not result in the fear for an upheaval and rendering particular values rootless, in terms of retaining Swazi socio-cultural identity.

The shift towards a language shift, however, shows an increasing degree of language and cultural awareness particularly among the urbanised demonstration in Swazi society youth and adults. The liberation of language marks a major effort toward linguistic universal values. This is a move towards ideas of discrimination against women as exemplified in the less frequent or abandonment of such words as *um-tedlane* (a woman who has recently given birth) to *ba-tedlane*, with the change word usage denoting humans in general. There is also the word *li-vezandlebe*, which meant ‘a child born out of wedlock’. In the literal sense the literal meaning of the word means ‘one with sticking out ears’. This was meant to denigrate the mother’s unbecoming social behaviour by begetting a child out of wedlock. The word has now been changed to *umtfwana wentfombi* ‘the child of the girl.’ This is more accommodating as the word conceals the fact that the child was acquired out of wedlock. It is interesting to note that the original word *li-vezandlebe* is becoming obsolete. Finally, this change in language use and cultural awareness shows and reflects an understanding of the changing language use which in the end will hopefully influence and reflect changing cultural values and increase society’s awareness of the way siSwati is attempting not to discriminate against women, as long as Swazi society still retains what it defines and describes as distinct Swazi values that identify it as an entity in its own right.

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