
The Social Functions of Female Voice in Politics and National Development in Selected Political Speeches of Patience Jonathan

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Abstract

Over the years, political and socio-economic participation in African society have been asymmetrical, and full of gender inequality. Women's participation in politics has been very low in Africa especially Nigeria due to the patriarchal structure of the society. Women and their voices are often made to appear irrelevant in issues that affect their lives and society; they are sometimes regimented to 'kitchen' and 'bedroom' responsibilities alone. However, the influence of women's voice in conflict resolution, socio-economic status of different homes and the society at large cannot be underpinned. This could be seen in the role of Aba women's riot of 1929. Their engagement in civil society, politics and social movements help to shape their society, and lobby the government towards the development of their areas. Several efforts and agitation both from women quarters and UN Right of Women to ensure that female voices are heard in politics, and policy making and decision taking of the society have been made, yet not much has been achieved in the political structure of Nigeria. This study investigates the social roles of female voice towards national development in selected political speeches of Patience Jonathan, wife of former president of Nigeria. The speeches were extracted from the internets and textually analyzed using the principle of social meaning of language in Systemic Functional Grammar of Halliday. Findings show that women's

voices in politics encourage social mobilization and collective action towards political success, and resolving conflicts and crisis that bedevil the national development. Again, Women's voice in politics helps to create social dynamism in politics and serves as agent of change.

Keywords: Social Functions, Female Voice, Political Speech, National Development

Introduction

For many years, women have been excluded from politics and leadership in Nigeria. Nigeria is a democratic country and as such everyone should enjoy equal right to vote and be voted for. However, this is not the case as seen in Nigeria today. The inclusion and equal participation of all citizens in administration and politics is very relevant for good governance, which in turn is necessary for sustainable peace and development in Nigeria. Despite efforts made by feminist writers, scholars, international bodies, activists and researchers to narrow the gap in gender inequality in the political sphere in Nigeria, the issue still persist. Although multiple international agreements and national laws recognize girls' and women's right to lead and participate in politics in accordance with democracy, the widespread absence of women in political and decision-making bodies abound.

Language occupies an important position in the life of humankind. In our everyday life, we use words as a means of communicating with other people, sending and receiving messages. Hence, language is regarded as human's most vital and fundamental attribute. Without language, there will be no contact and invariably there will be no human endeavours. Language is so

vital in human existence that there is hardly any situation or human function where language is not required.

One of the main goals of language is to communicate with people and to understand them. When someone speaks, he intends a specific purpose. He wants to convey a message through that language. A person uses his language for different purposes for example, to express his feelings, to make a plea and to apologize. Language is a very important factor of communication in the society. We use language to fulfil our needs. It is a crucial part in our life. It is used to give new information. Language can have an expressive function: that is, it can be used to express one's feelings and attitudes. Language can be used to make an order that is, directive function whereby we aim to influence the behaviour or attitudes of others. Language can also be performative, that is, it can be used to perform certain actions.

Language marks the identity of an individual. When an individual speaks in the midst of crowd, one can easily dictate the identity of the person; where he or she comes from, his educational status and psychological state. The language one speaks reveals the uniqueness of such individual. Language could therefore be said to be a marker and identifier. The ways individuals manipulate language vary from person to person and place to place. Individuals use language to express his or her ideas and personal feelings. There is therefore coordination between language and individual. According to Bauman (cited in Hall34) "Individual identity is the situated outcome of a rhetorical and interpretive process in which interactants make situationally motivated selections from socially constituted repertoires of identificational and affiliational resources and craft these semiotic resources into identity claims for presentation to others". Hence, there is a

profound influence of language in interpersonal relations of individuals and their images in society.

On socio-cultural level, the language use and individual identity is seen to be the product of lived experiences. It is the outcome of interaction with the social, political, cultural influences.

This paper therefore explores how language is used to perform social function and the social functions of female voice in politics and national development. It also highlights various economic, political, social and systemic practices that limit women's participation in politics, governance and development in Nigeria.

Women are a major force behind people's participation in the life of society today. Not only do they comprise the majority in terms of population, but they also play a crucial role in the society. Although women have made great strides in obtaining votes and right to be elected to political offices in Nigeria, there is great disparity between men and women especially in the political sector in Nigeria. The present state of women's low participation in politics is due to several factors such as socio-cultural practices, marginalization in political party, poor access to education, lack of women's empowerment, lack of political funding and so on. These have serious implications for leadership, good governance and development of our country. In Nigeria, traditional perceptions of women as inferior to men prevail, as many people continue to uphold cultural practices which enhance the subordination of women. Consequently, men continue to dominate women in political, economic, social, and religious realms. Democracy is supposed to accord equal opportunities, rights and privileges to all persons, irrespective of gender, race, religion, and so on. Sadly,

this is not in the case in Nigeria as women are still marginalized and indirectly excluded in politics.

The way an individual use language is of great relevance. Most importantly, female voice is a force to reckon with as would be proven in this study. The main purpose of this study is to examine female voice in politics and how female voice functions in the society. This study is therefore, geared towards addressing barriers in institutions, sociocultural practices and norms limiting women's participation in politics in order to empower all girls and women and amplify their voices in decision making processes thereby facilitating development. Hence, the study aims at raising awareness among girls and women of their rights and abilities to participate in the political realm of the society, fostering inclusivity in leadership roles and national development. This study will be of great importance to women to sensitize them of the great roles they play in the society, in politics and national development. This study will equally prepare women aspiring to participate in politics and administration to use language socially and ideationally to relate with people in the society.

Over the years, most women face multiple barriers to their full participation in politics. They experience challenges which can limit their political participation and leadership in Nigeria. Prevailing social norms and cultural attitudes discourage girls' and young women's political activism, which in turn limit their willingness to take political action. With little encouragement from their direct environment and limited female role models in the public sphere, levels of engagement in party activism among young women are lower than that of young men.

Factors that Limit Women's Participation in Politics, Leadership and National Development in Nigeria

1. Patriarchal and Socio-Cultural Practices in African Societies

Some socio-cultural practices in Nigeria do not allow participation of women in politics and decision-making processes. In Nigeria, traditional perceptions of women as inferior to men prevail, as many people uphold cultural practices which enhance the subordination of women. Consequently, men continue to dominate women in political, economic, social, and religious realms. Such practices keep women 'silent' in the public sphere.

2. Gender Inequality

One of the major factors that affect women's participation in politics is gender inequality. Since politics is traditionally conceived as a male domain, all financial, economic, commercial and political negotiations conducted outside the home are expected to be controlled by males. This results to Nigerian women having very limited access to decision-making process. This in turn reduces women's chances of participating in politics. These stereotypical constraints against women limit women's opportunity to attain political and leadership roles.

3. Poor Education/Poor Access to Education

According to the national policy on education (2004), every Nigerian child has the right to equal educational chance. It is a fact that women contribute meaningfully to national development, but a closer look at the educational system of Nigeria shows that female education is relegated. This problem has not only affected females' access to education, but their performance towards national development. There is clear disparity in the field of education

between the two sexes. There are a lot of barriers the girl-child faces and these bring about problems in education. They include: Early or forced marriage, household responsibilities, preference of male children to female, cultural norms and practices (boys are allowed to go to school while girls learn how to cook, how to care for children and how to be a good wife, girls and women are expected to do household chores. All these affect girls' and women's access to education thereby limiting them from participating in politics and national development.

4. Lack of Finance and Political Funding

Lack of funds is another factor that constrains women's participation in politics. Most women feel reluctant to contest for political positions as a result of inadequate funds to enable them to venture into politics.

5. Religious Practices

Some religious practices do not give room for women to appear in public, thus limiting women from contesting elections and applying into political offices.

6. Women Empowerment

Stereotypical and cultural practices in the past have confined women to the kitchen and other domestic activities. Women and their voice are made to appear irrelevant in issues that affect their lives and society as they are regimented to 'kitchen' and 'bedroom' responsibilities alone. Thus, most women are not yet empowered to participate and engage in political and public offices. This limits women's participation in politics and national development.

Factors like gender discrimination, lack of political funding, illiteracy and inadequate education, marginalization in

political party, patriarchy hierarchy, early marriages, and stereotypical constraints among others, have been identified as inhibiting women's low participation in leadership, politics and national development.

Women in Past Leadership Positions and their Contributions to Politics and National Development in Nigeria

Women contribute positively to political and national development in Nigeria. This section thus will review women's political contribution and participation through women who has been in various political and leadership positions in Nigeria.

1. Prof. Dora Nkem Akunyili

Professor Dora Nkem Akunyili (OFR) was a former Director General of National Agency for Food and Drugs Administration and Control and former Nigerian Minister of Information and Communications. She was internationally recognized and honoured for her significant contribution to the eradication of fake drugs, development of pharmacology and healthcare in Nigeria. She reduced the incidence of fake drugs in Nigeria. Professor Akunyili has undoubtedly saved many lives in Nigeria. She contributed greatly to the health sector of Nigeria.

2. Dr. (Mrs.) Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala

Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iwealais an economist and international development expert. She successfully transformed the Nigerian economic platform when she succeeded in negotiating a debt relief package for Nigeria as the Finance Minister (July, 2003-June, 2006) under the Obasanjo regime and also spearheaded the unpopular fuel subsidy removal policy by the Nigerian government, which led to protests under the Goodluck Jonathan

regime. Okonjo-Iweala served twice as Nigeria's Finance Minister and also as Minister of Foreign Affairs. She was the first female to hold both positions. During her first term as Minister of Finance under president Obasanjo's Administration, she spearheaded negotiations with the Paris Club of Creditors that led to the wiping out of US\$30 billion of Nigeria's debt, including the outright cancellation of US\$18 billion. Her legacy includes strengthening Nigerian's public financial systems and empowerment of Nigerian women and youth. She empowered Nigerian women and youth with the Growing Girls and Women in Nigeria Programme (GWIN) a gender responsive budgeting system and the highly acclaimed Youth Enterprise with Innovation programme (You WIN) to support entrepreneurs, which created thousands of jobs. She contributed positively to the economy of Nigeria.

3. Dr. (Mrs) Obiageli Ezekwesili

She is a Public Policy Analyst/Senior Economic Advisor. Dr Ezekwesili was the Vice President of World Bank (Africa Region) and former Nigerian Minister of Education, Minister of Solid Minerals, head of Budget Monitoring and Price Intelligence Unit as well as Chairperson of NEITI. She was the Senior Economic Advisor to Open Society, aimed at building vibrant and tolerant societies with democratically accountable governments. She currently runs the Africa Economic Development Policy Initiative (AEDPI), which provides policy expertise and advisory support to African Heads of Government and their cabinets. She was one of the co-founders of Transparency International. She served as Special Assistant and Senior Special Assistant to the President of Nigeria on Budget Monitoring, and the Price Intelligence Unit, where she spear-headed institutional reforms of the country's Public Procurement system. Subsequently, she served as Minister

of Solid Minerals Development, appointed in 2005; focused on reforming Nigeria's mining sector to meet internationally recognized standards. She gave a facelift to the political, social and economic sectors of Nigeria thereby enhancing national development.

Dr. Okonjo-Iwela, Prof Dora Akunyili, and Dr. Obiageli Ezekwesili and other women that have occupied political and decision making positions Nigeria have demonstrated exceptional leadership qualities and outstanding track records of achievement. They have contributed immensely to the development of Nigeria both politically, economically and socially. This should serve as a model to encourage women to engage and participate in politics. This should equally show that women have high prospects to serve well in leadership positions and national development contrary to the stereotypical beliefs of the society that women should be confined to the roles of family. These women exhibited exceptional qualities that endeared them to the hearts of most Nigerians, thereby giving credence that women in leadership positions have impacted positively and will continue to impact positively to national development.

Theoretical Framework

The theory of Systemic Function is an approach to language developed by M.A.K Halliday. He views language "not just as a formal activity but as a means through which its users perform actions and fulfil their social purposes and obligations" (Ezeifeke 164). Systemic functional grammar investigates language as a system of network that provides a set of interrelated option for making meaning. The social semiotic interpretation of language is motivated by the hypothesis that the system of natural language can best be explained in the light of the social functions which

language has evolved to serve. Language is as it is because of what it has to do (Halliday17). Halliday's functional interpretation of language (language as a system and language as institution) captures a conceptualisation of language in terms of the reality of the world of its speakers/writers within which it functions.

This theory is therefore used in this study to analyse the ideational and interpersonal functions of language from the speeches selected for the study. The ideational is classified into experiential and logical meaning. The experiential is concerned with ideas or content while the logical involves the relationship between ideas (Bloor and Bloor 13). The interpersonal meta-function which is the communicative roles and attitudes of participants who use language in a given context will also be explored in this study to see how female voice fulfil the social functions of language in political speeches.

Methodology

The study employed a qualitative research. In order to investigate the social functions of female voice in politics in Nigeria, the study selected two campaign speeches of Patience Goodluck Jonathan, wife of former president of Nigeria. The two speeches were selected from the 2015 Presidential election campaign. The speeches selected were analysed to show the social functions of female voice in politics. The speeches were equally analysed to show the ideational functions of language.

Data Analysis

From the data selected, the wife of the former president firstly, launched her campaign under the Women for Change and Development Initiative, with the purpose that women constitute the majority of the Nigerian population and thus hoped to gain their

votes. Secondly, she employed the ideational meta-functions of language by presenting the social realities of what was happening in Nigeria at the moment and then presenting the bitter experiences to come should Nigerian citizens vote in APC.

Communicative and Ideational Meta-Function

Dame Patience Jonathan started by saying,

“Why can’t we encourage the young ones to grow? Why can’t we encourage them to do better? We, our mother born us and train us, why they train us is that we should be better than them. Are we to bring the young ones down? It’s not our portion.”

Putting aside the grammaticality of the statement above, we could see that Mrs. Jonathan employed the use of rhetoric questions to inform her audience/listeners about the state of Nigerian Youths. She made use of repetition of the words, ‘why can’t we’ to present the helplessness of the citizens of Nigeria. She urged the women not to vote for the APC because, according to her, they have nothing to offer.

She went further to use language to express the ideational meta-function that is her experiences and idea of what has happened in the past administration and what is to come in Nigeria if the right party is not voted in, thus, saying,

“A bird at hand is worth a million in the bush. Nigerian women, let us shine our eyes. Go and ask your forefathers, they send you to jail, they send your fathers to jail, they will send your husbands to jail, me as a woman, am not ready to carry food to my husband in jail, I reject to carry food to jail. Women of Nigeria, are you ready to go to jail?”

Are you ready to go and give your husband food in jail? It is not our portion. We reject it. Have they changed? No”

She metaphorically used the statement, ‘a bird at hand is worth millions in the bush’ to show that the previous administration, that is her husband did well and will be a better party to rule than the party that Nigerians do not even know how they will perform if voted into office. She equally employed the logical meta-functions of language by relating the sufferings of previous Nigerians who were unjustly and forcefully sent to prison by saying, ‘ask your forefathers, they send your fathers to jail’. Though, this may be a campaign strategy, it had the expected communicative effect on the listeners as they started expressing refusal, fear and denial by chorusing ‘no’.

Dame Jonathan further made a reference to the past administrations by saying,

“Ask them, when they were there, what did they do for you? Women of Nigeria, did they do anything for you? This is the time they have come to tell you ‘I will,’ I will what? What you did not do before, is it now that you will come and do it?”

From the above, she made use of the adverb ‘when’ to make a logical reference to the past experiences of Nigerian citizens who are being promised good facilities and basic amenities during campaigns and yet are denied those amenities upon winning elections by candidates. She made use of ‘what did they do’ to refer to the false promises made by candidates aspiring to be elected to office, thereby illustrating that the speech acts are insincere thus violating the sincerity condition and maxim of speech acts. Thus, by doing so, she was able to convince her

audience/listeners to vote for the right party in order to enjoy good governance and leadership in the country.

Roles and Interpersonal Meta-Function

The interpersonal function of the Systemic Functional Grammar comes into play as the speaker, Mrs Jonathan, constantly made use of 'I', 'we', 'us', 'our' to relate with the listeners that she feels their pains, sufferings and experiences in the society, words like 'fellow Nigerian women', 'our husbands' were used by the speaker to show camaraderie, that she shares the experiences and sufferings of other Nigerian women, thereby gaining their approval. Here, she took the role of one who shares in the plight of other Nigerian women thereby endearing her to their hearts, thus gaining their hearts.

Dame Jonathan also employed the interpersonal meta-function in the words below:

“We are not propagandaly. We are not here to deceive you. We are not here to lie for you. Because whatever we say go and search because you will see it”.

Here, the speaker (representing PDP the party in government at that time) assumes a sincere role of performing the necessary obligations required to the hearers (women of Akwa Ibom/citizens of Nigeria). The repetition of 'we' by the speaker was used to show the feeling of the speaker that there is a communal and united effort and role shared between her and the party she represents towards achieving a better life for the people of Nigeria.

Social Functions of Female Voice in Politics and National Development

The Women for Change and Development Initiative (W4CI), launched by Dame Patience Jonathan, wife of the former President of Nigeria came against the backdrop of giving a face-lift to women representation in the political landscape of Nigeria. According to the National Officer, Women for Change and Development Initiative (W4CI) Hon. Chinwe Ugwu,

The women for change initiative is championing the review and revision of laws considered inimical to the welfare and peaceful existence of women. And these laws abound in the country such as the tax laws, land use Act of 1976, marriage laws, inheritance Act and even the Electoral Act... (Vanguard 14)

As one of the cardinal objectives of the Women for Change and Development Initiative (W4CI), the affirmative action is a concept which can be traced to the international women conference held in Beijing, China in 1985. According to the objective of W4CI which pointed out that although, Nigeria women have made gains in certain fields of human endeavour, problems still persist in many areas and women's share in governmental decision making process remains far-fetched. A key strategy in promoting women's empowerment and gender equality has been the adoption of "affirmative action" to correct the age-long gender imbalance across societies. This cardinal objective is driven by the W4CI's vision of creating "a movement that will engender the mass awareness of women at all levels to their human rights and obligations as citizens of Nigeria. The focal point in the 1985 Affirmative Action is that more women should be allowed to participate in politics. The agreement reached by member nations

that attended the conference was that 35% affirmative action should be allowed in government.

This 35% that was promised women in political participation was used by Dame Patience Jonathan in her campaign speech thus,

“So you can see that your deputy governor today is a product of 35 percent. You can see that the minister today is a product of 35 percent. So I have come again this time, 2015, to talk to you again.” “Remember when the men were campaigning, I just follow them quietly because I was waiting for them to give me go-ahead. I was waiting for them to tell me what they have for Nigerian women. “And they told me that this time we have given you 35 percent, go and tell their women that if they vote us back, that we are going to give them 45 percent.”

Dame Patience Jonathan having realized the vast population of women in Nigeria and the functions they can perform towards earning her victory in the presidential election launched the Women for Change and Development Initiative and assured women that PDP has succeeded in allocating the 35% promised women in political participation and positions. She further said that PDP would increase the quota of women’s participation in governance to 45% if the party wins in the elections.

The effects of this were greatly reflected in the results of the elections as PDP won in most states where her campaign were carried out, like in Akwa Ibom PDP won with 953,304 votes while APC (the chief opposing party) won 58,411 and in some other states. This is because the teeming population of women in Nigeria having been persuaded by the words of the former first lady of Nigeria came out to vote for PDP. This shows that women have great roles to play in the country. Although, PDP did not win in the

2015 Presidential elections, they got a great number of votes and this is attributed greatly to the efforts made by women who participated positively in the election process.

Dame Patience Jonathan's campaign rhetoric specifically targets women, emphasizing on the number of women in Nigeria. Findings show that women's voices in politics encourage social mobilization and collective action towards political success, and resolving conflicts and crisis that bedevil the national development. Again, Women's voice in politics helps to create social dynamism in politics and serves as agent of change.

Recommendations

This study therefore recommends the following:

1. **Empowerment of Women in Politics:** Women empowerment schemes and programmes should be set-up. There is need to increase the level of women participation in politics. In order to do this, there is the need for sensitization of women to political participation, thus, creating enabling environment for women to participate in politics thereby enhancing national development.

2. Government and international agencies need to implement and adopt better programmes and policies that will enhance gender equity in Nigeria especially in politics. Although several efforts have been made in the past by various organizations both at the national and international level, more efforts should be put into implementing these policies. Government and other stakeholders should engage in programmes and policies that would empower women politically, socially and economically. This would help to improve women's participation in politics and national development.

3. Organization of international and national conferences on women's rights to educate women about their rights and responsibilities. Seminars and other educational programmes should be conducted to educate or raise an awareness of the inequalities and differences between the male and female gender in Nigeria. It is important to eradicate all discriminatory policies against women, by reviewing the structure and operational guidelines of political parties.

4. Community leaders should be encouraged to re-examine cultural practices and norms that lead to the subordination of women and violation of their rights. The existing traditional structures which exclude women from participating in decision-making should also be reformed.

5. Mainstreaming gender in all sectors of government policies and programmes. In order to narrow the gender gap in Nigeria and other countries witnessing related gender discrimination and bias, a gender mainstreaming approach should be adopted. Gender mainstreaming is a globally accepted strategy for promoting gender equality. UNESCO's gender mainstreaming strategy ensures that women and men benefit equally from programme and policy support.

6. Financial support should be provided for women political aspirants. This would help to increase women's participation in politics and national development.

Conclusion

Women constitute half of Nigeria's population. With the population of women exceeding half of national world's population, it is right therefore, that they participate effectively in the political scene, especially in democratic system of Nigeria. Democracy thrives on the principle that power belongs to the people. For national development to take place in Nigeria, women should be given greater opportunity to serve, as they constitute a larger portion of the national population. Female voice contributes a great deal towards national development in Nigeria and as such, it should not be overlooked. There is therefore need for the female voice to be harnessed positively to promote development in Nigeria.

Language as proven in the study is a powerful tool for communicating the experiences of the people in the social. Hence, the way we use language matter a great deal in shaping the minds of the people in the society. Therefore, women should carefully choose the proper medium and suitable language for upholding social values and exposing the vices in the society as well.

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