

## **Sexisms in Nigerian Pidgin and (Nigerian) English: ‘Wetin Man Go Do’ About No ‘Goddess’, No ‘Spinster of Arts’ and ‘Mistress Of Science’**

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### **Abstract**

Since the late 1990s and the turn of this millennium, sexism has gained attention in Nigerian English and Literature. Educated Nigerians are becoming more and more sensitive to the use of gender-inclusive and gender-biased expressions. This paper sets out to identify common sexist expressions in Nigerian English and Naija (Nigerian Pidgin and critically interpret them against the backdrop of the Nigerian sociolinguistic milieu. The paper is a sociolinguistic documentation and critique of the use of sexist expressions in the two codes. Data were collected from different sources such as students’ papers, scripts, books, the social media, the Internet and live language events, which the researchers either participated in or listened keenly to and jotted down sexist expressions in the researchers’ diaries. The data thus gathered were numbered and consecutively presented and interpreted. Using Glick and Fiske’s (2001) propositions and Rikki Rogers’ (2014) typology of sexism, the paper established that ‘exclusive’, ‘benevolent’ and ‘hostile’ sexisms are banal in Nigerian English and Nigerian Pidgin, and that such sexist expressions and concepts stoke and sustain concrete acts of sexism in the political, educational, economic, cultural and social spheres of our collective and personal existence. The paper recommends that the educated elite should cultivate the habit of using gender-sensitive language and that sexism should be taught in the General Studies Use of English in tertiary institutions.

**Keywords:** *Sexism, Nigerian Pidgin, Nigerian English, gender-sensitive language, sex and gender*

### **Introduction**

Sexist language and gender-sensitive language are now hot-buttons in academic and social discourses. Sexism, from a general perspective, is any form of bias, oppression and diabolism against one on the basis of one’s natural or acquired sex and gender in any sphere of life. Sexism manifests in economic, political, cultural, educational, religious, social spheres and language use. David Crystal (1997) observes that people have become conscious of how language ‘reflects’ and ‘maintains’ social attitudes towards men and women’. ‘The criticism’ has been directed toward how men use language to bias and undermine women in ‘a male-oriented world’ (p. 46). American feminists and women rights activists in the 1960s arouse consciousness against sexism and gender bias though the anomie has been being interrogated before the 1960s (Marx and Engels 1848; Dobie, 2012).

Fred R. Shapiro (1985) says that Pauline M. Leet most likely coined sexism on November 18, 1965 in her forum contribution entitled ‘Women and the Undergraduate’ where she observed thus: ‘When you argue...that since fewer women write good poetry this justifies their total exclusion, you are taking a position analogous to that of the racist — I might call you in this case a “sexist”... (p. 3). Shapiro also says that sexism appeared in print for the first time on November 15, 1968 in ‘On Being Born Female’ by Caroline Bird (p. 6). Ivy and Backlund (1994) says that sexist expressions encapsulate attitudes and practices that degrade the other sex. Concrete acts of sexism are expressed, stored and transmitted in language from one generation to another. Critical writings on sexist language and the feminist movement in America engendered official and institutional responses against it. For example, in 1975, the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) in America released guidelines for gender-sensitive expressions in its publications. Two decades later, the Linguistic Society of America (LSA) and also other academic and professional associations such as the American Psychological Association (APA), the Modern Language Association (MLA), among others, released approved guidelines for gender-inclusive language. Many states of the United States enacted laws against the use of sexist expressions (Animashaun, 2015).

In Nigeria, the consciousness of using gender-sensitive expressions is now blossoming in academics and other spheres of life. Activists, feminist writers and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO) such as Women in Nigeria (WIN) founded in 1980, now inactive, and Girls Power Initiatives, founded by Bene Madunagu and Grace Osakue, still very active, have significantly raised awareness in socio-cultural sexism and gender discrimination and also influenced government and institutional responses to it (Madunagu, 2017:22). There are now provisions in the Nigerian constitution and other statutory documents against gender bias (See Rights Entrenched in the Constitution, 2020).

Nigeria is a patriarchal society where the line of divide between the two major sexes is very sharp in all areas of individual and collective life. Eniola (2018) states that Nigeria is a highly gender-stratified society in which men look down on women as players of the second fiddle. Although it is a patriarchal society, and so sexism is tilted more against the women folk, recent events and coinages show that the trend is changing in several ways. Men are also becoming victims of different forms of sexism in many socio-cultural contexts which are often ignored and ‘hostile sexism’ is directed against lesbians, homosexuals and transgenders/transsexuals though these queer dimensions to sexuality are not the focus of this paper. Sexism, which emanates from thoughts and socio-cultural constructions, is conceptualised and transmitted in language. Since thoughts and ideas are abstract and are often concretised in language and actions, a study of sexism in Nigeria should commence from language sexism.

Swim, Mallet and Stranger (2004:170) say, “First of all, it is necessary to make people aware of how sexist language works and of the beneficial effects of the use of gender-fair expressions. This should motivate the change of linguistic habits and to use language in a more symmetrical and equal fashion.” Accordingly, a number of studies have decried the scourge of sexism and documented many linguistic sexism in Nigerian English and other Nigerian languages (Yusuf, 2002; Umera-Okeke, 2012; Yusuf, 2015; Eniola, 2018). Studies in sexism in the languages used in Nigeria are yet at the stage of identifying, describing and discouraging linguistic sexism. Existing studies need to be augmented with research in and adequate documentation of linguistic sexism in all the languages used in Nigeria. Although

in recent times, Nigerian academic writers and speakers tend to avoid sexism consciously, the linguistic habit of using sexist expressions yet flourish among the generality of Nigerian users of Pidgin and English. Also, educated Nigerians, particularly women, have become much aware and insist on the use of gender-sensitive language. Nigerian Pidgin and Nigerian English, being the two most widely spread lingua franca, are replete with sexist expressions. Hence, the paper focuses on them to expand the frontiers of knowledge and documentation of language sexism, particularly recent examples.

Pidgin, now appropriately called Naija, and Nigerian English are two similar and different languages that the Nigerian population use. The population of Nigeria at present is 206, 139, 589 (Nigeria Population, 2020). About 79 million (43%) of literate and highly educated Nigerians use different intranational varieties of English as lingua franca and official language. However, the number of Nigerians who use Standard Nigerian English has not been exactly determined. Far less than 79 million (guesstimate puts it at 5-8 million Nigerians) use Educated Nigerian English (Minh 2015). Unlike English, Naija is indigenous to Nigeria. It has been established that most Nigerians speak and/or understand Naija (BBC 2016; Ekundayo 2018). Sexisms flourish in both languages, coming into them either as semantic transfer from local languages and culture or from other English varieties and the culture of native English speakers. Against this backdrop, this paper focuses on sexism in Nigerian Pidgin and Nigerian English using Glick and Fiske's (2001) propositions and Rikki Rogers' (2014) typology of sexist expressions.

The paper interrogates the phenomenon of language sexism with a view to providing answers to these questions:

- What are the specific examples of sexism in the languages?
- What are their implications for social interaction at the levels of concrete behaviours?
- How do we avoid them and what gender-sensitive language options are available for speakers of the language?

In providing answers to these questions, the paper documents a number of language sexism and explain their implications for heterosexual interaction and attitudes. In subsequent sections, the methodology, conceptual frameworks, review of related studies, examples of language sexism, their interpretations, critical comments on them, and the findings and conclusion of the paper are presented.

### **Conceptual Framework and Literature Review**

The critical assessment of sexist expressions here is based on the relevant concepts in sexism, the concepts of Nigerian Pidgin, Nigerian English and their nexus. First we examine language sexism, Nigerian English and Nigerian Pidgin and a brief review of related previous studies.

## **Sexism and Sexist Languages**

In the beginning of his article on sexism in the English language, Aileen Pace Nilsen (2019) states as follows:

Speakers are prone to use the division of male and female as a metaphor for many other aspects of life: The differences in language describing and attributed to males and females illustrates the swirling effects of culture on language and language on culture. As you read this piece, think of the many ways that the language you speak has been shaped by the fact that virtually all living creatures are either male or female. (p.173)

Michela Menegatti and Monica Rubini (2017) asserts that language is a very subtle resource of unintentional and intentional discrimination against women, and we should add men, lesbians, homosexuals and transgenders. Language is the first vehicle of sexism. In order to show how sex and gender bias are wired 'in the grammatical and syntactical rules of different languages', and 'the extent to which a language' sustains gender discrimination, Stahlberg, *et al* (2007) propose three types of languages. They are genderless languages, natural gender languages, and grammatical gender languages. According to them, the three types have lexical items that distinguish the two sexes such as "women," "sister," "father," or "man."

However, this is the only sex-marking for genderless languages (e.g., Finnish, Turkish), that have neither grammatical gender for nouns nor for personal pronouns. In natural gender languages (e.g., English, Scandinavian languages) there is no grammatical marking of sex, such that most nouns and their dependent linguistic forms (articles, adjectives, pronouns) can be used to refer to both males and females, and personal pronouns are the major resource for expressing gender. In grammatical gender languages (e.g., French, Italian, German) all nouns are assigned feminine or masculine (or neutral) gender, and the dependent parts of speech carry grammatical agreement to the gender of the corresponding noun. For instance, *the sea* is masculine in Italian, *il mare*, and feminine in French, *la mer*. Moreover, in these languages, grammatical and syntactical rules are built in a way that feminine nouns or adjectives are often marked as they derive from the corresponding masculine form. Similarly, masculine nouns and pronouns are often used with a generic function, that is, to refer to both men and women. (p. 170)

Some African languages fall into this category of genderless and natural gender languages. For example, many Nigerian languages have no special pronoun cases for gender such as *he, she, him and her, patron/matron, actor/actress*, as in English. So, 'she is elegant' and 'He is elegant' in English will be translated with the same structure in Yoruba and Edo languages: *O'le wa`* (Yoruba for 'He or she is fine'); *O' mo' se`* (Edo for 'He or she is fine'); *O' hiemi` lu shẹ`* (Okpameri for 'He or she is fine'); *O' mara mma`* (Igbo for 'He or she is fine'). Hausa differentiates them as *Kana` de kiawo`* (She is fine), and *Yena` de kiawo`* (He is fine). Nigerian languages, Pidgin and Nigerian English users use many sexist expressions.

## **Sexist Language and Expressions**

A sexist expression is one-sex-centred; for example, the use of ‘man’ in ‘man must die’ to mean ‘all human beings must die’, ‘mankind’, ‘*Man* is a political animal’, ‘No *man* has seen God,’ ‘*Man* plans, God disposes’, etc. It may obviously or subtly exclude the opposite sex in a situation or matter that should include them, or demeans and commonises the opposite sex. Users of such expressions believe or take them for granted that the other sex is included, or not being demeaned; for example, ‘every church member should bring *his* anointing oil.’

Glick and Fiske (2001:116-120), identify two types of sexist language prejudice, which are ‘expressly hostile’ and ‘subjectively benevolent’. They explain ‘hostile sexism’ as a derogatory presentation of women and ‘negative feelings toward them in order to justify male power, traditional gender roles, and men’s consideration of women as sexual objects’. “Benevolent sexism is a more subtle form of prejudice toward women because it sees them as pure, kind, gentle, and in need of men’s protection, therefore justifying male dominance and women’s subordinate role.” We use this categorisation to analyse our examples. According to Rikki Rogers (2014), sexist expressions show in the three ways given below:

- a. Harmful sexist language: Certain sexist expressions can be deeply hurtful. Some examples are ‘You son of a bitch,’ ‘mother fucker’, ‘father fucker’, ‘women have fish brains’, ‘men are he-goats’, ‘she’s a public dog’. They refer to men and women in a very derogatory and hurtful manner, what Glick and Fiske call hostile sexism.
- b. Ambivalent or benevolent sexist language: This refers to expressions that view women and men in stereotypical roles. Rogers (2014) says that “it usually originates in an idealisation of traditional gender roles: women are ‘naturally’ more kind, emotional, and compassionate, while men are “naturally” more rational, less emotional, and “tougher,” mentally and physically. Translated into the workplace, ambivalent or benevolent sexism is behind the assumption that women are naturally better administrative assistants or naturally prepared to organise buying a gift for the boss. Because they’re ‘better’ at it (2014:1). This is reflected in language when expressions like “don’t cry like a woman; be a man,” ‘please, man up’, etc. are made.
- c. Unintended Sexist language. This is using sexist expressions are used without even meaning to sound sexist. For example, the common ‘hey guys’ or ‘Hi guys!’ which people use to refer to both males and females shows that the peculiarities of the females have been totally downplayed. Another example is ‘**mankind**’ or the use of ‘man’ to denote both sexes, as in ‘Wetin man go do na?’ in Nigerian Pidgin, never ‘Wetin woman go do na?’

Language is dynamic, but sexist expressions die hard. In a bid to ‘desexify’ language, sexism may be modified, but according to Sara Mills (2008: 125), “the past meanings and usages of a word are what exert themselves on the current usage and interpretations.” Sexisms flourish unquestioned in Nigerian English and Nigerian Pidgin until the turn of the millennium

## **Nigerian Pidgin and Nigerian English**

Nigerian Pidgin and Nigerian English are two related codes, the latter being the major lexifier (words supplier) of the former. The relationship between the two languages is not that of variety differentiation, though some people and scholars yet have difficulty in accepting that Pidgin is not a variety of English; or still call it ‘Pidgin English’ even when they believe that

they are not the same language (Babalola, 2018; Soneye, 2019). The relationship that exists between them is that of language family. Pidgin may be seen as the linguistic child of English and Nigerian languages. Its fathers are Nigerian languages and its mother English, or vice versa. Naija language is best described and treated as a different language from English (Faraclas 2005). The language originated from the contact between European imperialists, first the Portuguese and later the Britons, from the 16th century (Elugbe & Omamor 1991; Faraclas 2005).

Standard English in Nigeria was a development of the 19th century. Thus Pidgin is actually older than English in Nigeria. Nigerian Pidgin went through many stages of expansion and development before it became Creolised in Nigerian major cities, particularly in Western, Southern and Central Nigerian Cities (Lagos, Benin City, Warri, Port Harcourt, Calabar, Kaduna, Abuja, etc.), which are multilingual and conurbations of different ethnic groups (Ekundayo, 2018). Today, it is the leading lingua franca in Nigeria and its areas of use and functions are more diverse than those of the English language. Naija Language, its most appropriate name given it in 2009 at the Ibadan Linguistic Conference, is also the number one language in West Africa in terms of the population of its users, areas of use and function. It is a major contender for the vacant position of national language in Nigeria (Faraclas, 2005; BBC, 2016; Ekundayo, 2018). However, its major challenge at present is the lack of uniform standardised orthography due to the neglect it suffers from linguists and grammarians who are swallowed in promoting English and other foreign languages. In spite of this neglect, Naija keeps bulldozing its way into prominence, displacing foreign and local languages at times.

English is the second most popular lingua franca and the official language in Nigeria. It is the language of the educated elite, government, broadcast and international communication. Within Nigeria, it has many sub-varieties which are distinguishable according to geographical, educational and social dimensions. The most popular dimension has been Ayo Banjo's (1971, 1996) educational classification of Varieties I, II, III and IV. Variety I is the lowest type which primary school dropouts and leavers use. It is replete with egregious grammatical errors and broken structures. Variety II is the most popular Nigerian English spoken by more than 70% of literate Nigerians: secondary school leavers, junior civil servants, the rank and file of the Nigerian armed forces, etc. Errors of grammar are reduced in this variety. Variety III is spoken by well-educated Nigerians: graduates, writers, teachers and lecturers, pastors, senior military officers, the judiciary, government, diplomats, among others. But about 5% of educated Nigerians use variety III, which is Educated Nigerian English and the variety that speakers of varieties I & II aspire to speak. It is Nigerian standard and in 2019 the number of speakers who use this variety has certainly increased more than 5% of the population.

Lastly, Banjo presents variety IV as variety which sounds Queen's English, RP, American or any other English as a first language or mother tongue. However, very few educated Nigerians speak this variety. It is the idiolect of few Nigerians who were born and brought up in native English speaking countries like the UK and the USA or half-castes, or those Nigerians who have over time learnt to imitate the phonological mannerism of native English people. Banjo says that variety IV is not widely accepted because it sounds too affected and foreign. In Nigeria today, Banjo's assertion about the social disdain for variety IV remains the reality in some quarters; for example, when a fellow Nigerian is in the midst of the speakers of varieties

I and II. But speakers of variety IV in variety III environment are often admired, but not necessarily imitated, for achieving the use of a foreign accent. There are several other sociolinguistic classifications (Adekunle, 1979; Udofot, 1997; Ogbulogo, 2005), among others. In this paper, we focus on sexist expressions in the two related languages, which are often ignored. However, some sexism have been documented in few research papers.

### **Empirical Studies**

A number of studies have been done on sexism. One of such studies is Margaret Piercey (2000:113) who argues that linguistic sexism is entrenched in the grammar and literature of the English language, stating that sexism “reflects the cultural values of men, what they find important (and what they do not), and these values are then handed down to each new.” Also, Yisa Yusuf (2002) and Animashaun (2015) compared linguistic sexism in the grammar of English and Yoruba language and submits that sexism of English origin influence sexism in Yoruba and Nigerian Pidgin though Yoruba and Pidgin are not as sexist as English, a finding confirmed in this study. Similar to Yusuf’s paper is Umera-Okeke’s (2012) treatment of sexist expressions from several perspectives of grammar and lexico-semantics; namely, “English as a sexist language” (p.5), “sexism in semantics” (p. 6), lexical or “morphological sexism” (p.9), “sexism in syntax” (p.10), sexism in “honorifics and titles” (p.12), sexism in the “use of non-parallel terms” (13), and then alternative gender-inclusive terms for the sexist expressions in Umera-Okeke’s paper (pp.14-16).

Similar to Umera-Okeke’s paper is Olorufemi Animashaun’s (2015) study of sexist language in the ‘Nigerian Guardian’ and ‘Punch’. The paper established that the newspaper use such sexism as singular masculine pronouns for both sexes (*he, his, him*); generic masculine words such as *mankind, man*, for both sexes; masculine uses of genderless terms such as *he* for the *sun* and *she* for the *moon*; sexist suffixes as in Umera-Okeke (2012); unnecessary sex-marked expressions; derogatory expressions, and pseudo-masculine expressions (pp.68-73). Tanumu Yusuf (2018) investigated the attitudes of selected Nigerian students to sexist expressions and the new terms introduced to ensure gender inclusion. His study established that some of the informant believed that the words tested were sexist while some believed that it did not matter. Yusuf’s paper does not account for the various sexist expressions used in English, let alone in Nigerian Pidgin. His focus was to establish people’s attitudes to some so-tagged sexist expressions and the use of suggested alternative expressions.

While Umera-Okeke’s paper focuses on popular sexist expressions and orientation in the English language, Animashaun’s examples are drawn from two Nigerian newspapers. However, their examples were not only taken from one sphere of life, they are also not exhaustive. Many examples of sexist words in use were not documented in the papers and none of them focused on Pidgin, the number one language in Nigeria. Hence, this paper takes examples from different real speech events in various domains of life in which Nigerian English and Nigerian Pidgin are used. Besides, some examples of entrenched sexist expressions in English in general and recent sexist coinages in Nigerian English and Nigerian Pidgin in particular are critically evaluated and documented in this paper.

In Nigerian English and Naija, some Nigerians at times use sexist expressions to convey bias against the opposite sex, demean, insult and intimidate the other sex either consciously or unconsciously because such expressions and habit are ingrained in the languages and cultures of Nigerians. However, many educated Nigerians now consciously use gender-sensitive expressions such as ‘If anyone comes, tell *him* or *her* that I’m in a meeting’, or. ‘...tell them I’m in a meeting.’ This trend in communication today has to be sustained. One way of sustaining it is to identify and document, as much as possible, sexist expressions in Nigerian languages and provide alternative gender-inclusive expressions where possible. Hence, this paper, which provides additional examples and shows how they influence sexism in other spheres of life.

### **Methodology**

The research adopted the qualitative method to critically evaluate sexism in Nigerian Pidgin and Nigerian English. It identified the use of sexist expressions against the opposite sex, either natural male (man) or female (woman) in the two codes and documented them accordingly. Data were collected from sundry sources such as social interactions and daily speech events in Edo, Delta, Lagos, Kogi and Abuja, Nigeria and library sources in the main. The researchers, being Nigerians themselves, observed, either as participants or non-participants in different language events, how Nigerians used the two languages to describe the other sex and took time to document the expressions commonly used actively from 2015 to 2020. A total of one hundred examples were thus collated but fifty-six of them were sifted and deemed fit for this paper: thirty-seven examples from social interaction at different times, five examples from some undergraduate students’ examination scripts, four examples from postgraduate seminar papers, four from the Internet, three from Nigerian English home videos entitled *Taken* and *How the Handsome Cook...*, and two from the social media from 2015 to 2020. Data were consecutively presented using Glick and Fiske’s (2001) propositions and Rogers’ (2014) typology of sexist expressions.

As Nigerian Pidgin does not have uniform standardised orthography, the Pidgin orthography adopted in this paper is the phonetic spelling model proposed and illustrated in Ekundayo (2018), which is similar to the *Jehovah Witness’* Pidgin orthography in *Awake* and *Watch Tower* (2015) and Elugbe and Omamor’s (1991) Pidgin orthography. In this form of orthography, Pidgin words are spelt as pronounced in most instances.

### **Sexist Expressions in Nigerian English and Naija Language**

In this section, the examples gathered are presented first as in Nigerian English and subsequently the Naija examples. In the Nigerian English examples, the entrenched forms, which Nigerian English inherited from British English, are first presented (1-23) before the ones that may be peculiar to Nigerian English or rather expressed with Nigerian English flavour (23-43).



## **Sexist Expression in Nigerian English**

This are highlighted below in italics and followed with explanation. First, we look at unintended and biased examples: those which subtly exclude women but assume they are included.

### **Unintended and Subtly Exclusive Sexist Expressions**

**The concept of *God*, but no *Goddess*?** The concept of ‘God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit’ excludes females in spiritual hierarchy and pantheon. The Roman Catholic, perhaps, try to correct this by stressing the role of ‘Mary, the Mother of God’ (?). Really, Is God male or female, or female and male? This conceptualisation of the God-Head clearly excludes women. Perhaps, women should start talking about Goddess the Mother, Goddess the Daughter and Goddess the Holy Spirit, or even ‘Goddess of Abraham and Jacob’. Similarly, all the names of angels in the Bible are male: *Angels Gabriel, Emmanuel, and Michael*; no *Angels Gabriella, Emmanuella and Michelle*. This nomenclature is spiritual language sexism which manifests in the clergy’s attitude to or against women in Christendom.

**Bachelor of Art /Science degree, no *Spinster* of Arts/Science.** Here is a sexist term entrenched in English. How are women *bachelors*? Because they have a first or second degree so tagged? Should the proper labels not be ‘Bachelor’, or ‘Master of Art/Science’ for men and ‘Spinster’, or ‘Mistress of Art/Science for women’?

**Our *forefathers*.** This excludes our *ancestral mothers*. Humankind’s genealogy and progeny consist of men and women, fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters. Our ‘forefathers’ is sexist and so should be replaced with our ‘foreparents’, or ‘ancestors.’

***Mother tongue.*** This is another entrenched case which excludes fatherhood or father tongue. The most appropriate term is ‘parent language’ or ‘parent tongue’.

Somehow in English, the word ‘man’ appears in some words and idioms that denote both sexes. Although some of them are idiomatic, and so have remained fixed, they are exclusive sexist expressions.

***Manhandle.*** Although the term subtly confers physical power on men, it is sexist. It also in a way presents men as rough and hard while women are soft and gentle (benevolent sexism). The reality is that some men are soft and gentle just as some women are rough and hard. If a woman, for example, handles a man or a fellow woman hard and roughly is it *manhandling* or *womanhandling*? Instead of *manhandle, malhandle, rough handle, maltreat, abuse* are gender-inclusive alternatives.

***Manhole*** (a big hole that can swallow one). Since a hole swallows anyone, man or woman who steps on it, the use of man to describe it is sexist, just as in *mankind*. *Pit hole, deep hole*, as in *pit latrine*, not man latrine, is suggested for use.

**Man hour.** Man hour refers to an hour of work or service that one puts into a job. It excludes female work although the definition takes it for granted that they are included. Work hour, duty hour is suggested in its place

**Man power.** This is a term for the total working force of an organisation, the energy put into production, is subtle sexism. Using man power to describe it excludes or down play the contributions of the female folks. A more gender-inclusive alternative is *human power*, *worker power* or *workers' power*.

**Ordinary man in the street.** A reference to anyone in the street, this subtle and relegating sexism assumes that only men are in the street, or that the term denotes both sexes. For gender-sensitivity, *ordinary people in the street*, *the masses*, *the people*, *men and women in the street* sounds better.

**Man of letters.** This one-gender term is actually meant to denote both genders. This expression should be retained with *woman of letter* so that we can use the appropriate one in a given context because women of letters are everywhere today

**Man-made.** Made-made is an adjective used to describe a creation, invention or situation that is not natural, or if natural, it is contrived by human being(s). This being the sense, therefore, why man-made? Why not *human-made*, or even *woman-made*? *Human-engineered*, *artificial*, *contrived*, etc., are more gender-sensitive alternatives

**Man to man** (is so unjust). The expression actually has both man and woman in mind, however, man has been used to represent both. We can retain this expression in addition to *woman to woman*. So, the context then determines which one to use.

**Man plans/proposes, but God disposes.** Originating from the Bible, Prov. 19:21, the use excludes women though men say that they include women in its use. In that case, why not 'woman proposes, God disposes', or 'woman proposes, Goddess disposes' to denote both men and women? 'One proposes, but God disposes' might be a better gender-inclusive variant.

**Man is the architect of his own fortune.** Again, this universal aphorism excludes women in the use of the noun *man* and the pronoun *his* to denote humanity. It should be 'everyone is the architect of their mis/fortune' or 'everybody is the architect of his or her mis/fortune'.

**He committed manslaughter.** The legal term *manslaughter* is 'sexistly' used for man and woman even when it is a woman that has been slaughtered. Although its etymology shows that the crime of killing human beings was predominantly carried out by men, recent experiences have shown that even women now slaughter. So, *womanslaughter* should augment the term. Lawyers would do better by using the terms *manslaughter* and *womanslaughter* respectively, as the case may be.

### **Hostile, Hurting and Degrading Sexist Expressions**

In this category are expressions used to hurt and demean the opposite sex deliberately or because they have become institutionalised in the language. Addressee do not feel good when they hear them.

**Womaniser/prostitute.** If a man who chases after women is a womanizer, why should we not call women who chase after men ‘manisers’, thus *womanise* for men and *manise* for women? Why the derogatory *prostitute*, *harlot*, *whore*, *ashawo*, *opio*, etc. for women?

**Women have fish or toad brains.** Here is a very common expression which men use to reduce the worth of women. The question is if women have fish or toad brains and yet men run after them desperately, will do anything to have them, and they give birth to and bring men up, then what sort of brains do men have?

**Henpecked husband** but no ‘cockpecked’ wife to balance the scale for women. Henpecked husband **is** a sexist term for a man who is controlled by a woman, particularly his wife. The man is seen as weak and not man enough. However, when a man controls a woman or his partner in marital or sexual relationship, he is seen as strong and reasonable.

### **Benevolent Sexist Expressions**

Benevolent sexual expressions are the types that superficially and exclusively seem to encourage, favour or pamper one gender, but when deeply assessed, they exclude the opposite sex from situations in which they have a stake and in fact, subtly or openly justify cultural stereotypes and shibboleths. Some examples are given from number 19 to 23.

**School of Nursing and Midwifery.** The use of *midwife* and *midwifery* is exclusive benevolent sexism, which sidelines the role of men in the occurrence and make women feel that that profession belongs to them. If it is to be taken as referring to both sexes: a person who is trained to ease labour and birth, why the choice of wife? Why not a more inclusive term, just as women complain that *mankind* lexically excludes women? Although the use of the term is informed by the fact that the practice used to be exclusively a woman’s affair, both women and men assist women in childbirth these day. Therefore, *midwifery* may be renamed *child-birth* or *child-labour: School of Nursing and Childbirth*. The verb and noun *midwife* becomes an issue. It can be retained but only for women. When it involves men *birth-manage*, birth-manager, *birth-assist*, *birth assistant* and *birth-ease* may be considered.

**Women are the weaker vessels.** Although this Biblical observation in 1st Peter 3:7 draws attention to women’s biological needs and differences and so benevolent, the entire world has turned it a derogatory expression against women. If we accept that women are the weaker vessels, women who carried men in their wombs and gave birth to them after nine months, who inspire men to go the extra mile to do well in life, how should we describe men? We could better say that ‘women need care and love especially when they are pregnant or nursing a baby;’ or ‘Men in most cases are stronger physically than women’

***It is a man's world/men rule the world.*** When men oppress and dominate women, pushing them to a helpless corner, women often say this. And what do we mean when we say it is 'a man's world'? Was it men that created the world? Interestingly, men also think that it is the 'women's world' because their labours and riches are hugely spent to give women comfort: mothers, wives, sisters, concubines and girlfriends. The reality is that the world belongs to both men and women, adults, children, and elders. We could say that 'women are very influential', 'men like to dominate women,' 'some women like to dominate their husbands.'

***Man is the breadwinner.*** Here is a benevolent sexist shibboleth. It makes men feel proud that they are in charge and providing for their family. However, it also provides grounds for women to exploit men financially. Today, even women 'win bread' while the men are the bread eaters. So, either a woman or a man can win bread for the family.

***Bachelors' eve*** (*stag night/party* in British English, *bachelor party* in American English, and *bucks night* in Australian English: The night before wedding when bachelors gather with the groom for 'assorted activities'; hence Nigerian women now call it 'bachelors' evil.' Unfortunately, there is no *spinsters' eve*, perhaps very soon. But in British English and practice, there is *hen party* or *night*, the opposite of bachelor party. Why is the one for males 'bachelor' but the one for female downgraded to 'hen party'? Are they hens? Why not 'spinster party' and/or why is bachelor night not called 'cock party'?

### **Sexisms with Nigerian Flavour**

The examples in this section are sexist axioms, idioms and assertions used daily in Nigerian English sometimes couched in Nigerian English expressions, such as in 'bottom power'. However, the underlying sexism that they denote/connote are not peculiar to Nigerian English. Some of them are expressed in different ways in other Englishes and languages.

### **The Hostile and Biased Sexisms**

***A man cannot open all his heart to a woman.*** This implies that all women are unreliable, a hasty generalisation. Men too are unreliable, or are they not? Betrayal is a human weakness. A more embracing or restrictive way to put it is, "some women or people are unreliable".

***Bottom power:*** It is a well-established euphemism for sex and sexuality and how they are used in society, especially by the womenfolk. It has been defined as women's habit of 'influencing favour from men through sex' (Adegbite, Udofot and Ayoola, 2014, p. 28). However, Ekundayo and Osekene (2020), argues that 'given the new trends in heterosexual activities in society today..., the term is sexist because it is used for women only, as if only women use sex to curry favours. They say that "if women use sex to curry favour with men, then it means that men also use sex as a condition to give women favour." So, they reconceptualised bottom power as "the deployment of sex and human sexuality to solve or complicate a problem or gain an advantage, which, among others, include advancing oneself socio-politically, economically, educationally, pleurably and otherwise". They further assert that even though "women mostly use bottom power, men also have 'bottom tool' which

they sometimes use to have an advantage. Bottom power, they say, “thrives where men encourage and are ready to accept it.” So, bottom power should denote the use of sex and sexuality by both sexes to please a man or women and gain their love, favour or support. Alternatively, words like *crotch power*, *turgid influence*, *pointed power*, *tool power*, etc. may be used to connote or denote the use male sexuality to achieve a purpose.

***My wife belongs to za (the) kitchen and za aza (the other) room.*** President Muhammadu Buhari of Nigeria used this sexist aphorism to express a deep-rooted belief and practice in his religion and culture in which a woman’s duties are restricted the kitchen, producing children and perform her sexual role in the bedroom and not to involve herself in political or other social affairs in the community. When President Buhari said this in 2016, there was a universal uproar. However, he was expressing a rooted belief and practice in his religion and some culture. Should we not rather complement one another in private and in public? (Ekundayo & Sokari 2019).

***Women will always be women, and men will always be men/All men are the same*** (Okoronkwo 2020). This expression presupposes that all women and men behave in the same way from age to age, that no matter what, woman or man will always show the peculiar characteristic of their gender or sex, particularly the negative ones. Although it is axiomatic, the danger here is that those who have this believe do not trust the other sex, no benefit of the doubt. Although human beings tend to behave in certain stereotyped ways, there are idiosyncrasies and individual peculiarities, which should observe. Rather than generalize, one could simply describe what the woman or man in question did: ‘She cheated on me, as some partners do.’ He tends to be bossy and arrogant, as some men carry themselves.’

***Women don’t make good leaders.*** This sexist assumption and its variants such as ‘a woman cannot be crowned king,’ ‘women are wicked administrators’ reinforces the socio-cultural habit of relegating women to the background of politics and traditional leadership. The assumption is false and insulting. Esther, Ruth, Deborah, Naomi, etc. in the Bible, Moremi of Ife ancient history, Queen Amina of Zaria, Queen Idia of ancient Edo Bini Kingdom, Margaret Thatcher of Britain, Funmilayo Ransom Kuti and Professor Dora Akwuyili of Nigeria, etc. were great women leaders. Women and men can turn out to be bad or good leaders (Ekundayo & Sokari, 2019)

***She is a house wife.*** The concept and practice of ‘house-wife’ is very common in Nigeria. Depending on how it is used, it can be benevolent or hostile sexism. It refers to the habit of taken a wife and restricting her to having children, taking care of them and staying at home. While this habit has some advantages where the husband is rich and can provide the means to pay for domestic bills, many men abuse the practice to enslave women. They do nothing at home, apart from providing money for feeding, watching football matches and savouring food which their wives serve them as kings, because they are the ‘heads’ of the family. Now, how about men that sit jobless at home while the wife pays the bills? Are they ‘house husbands’? They are called husbands all the same.

***Men are he-goats/snakes, black mambas and women slots*** (Ejiofor 2020). This is hurting sexism. The expression assumes that all men are sexually loose and can have sex with any woman, including their children and mothers. This is arguable. The expression can be

mitigated as follows: ‘Some men are very unfaithful/randy.’ ‘Some men can sleep with any woman,’

***Men can sleep with anything in skirt.*** Same as in number 30 (Ikhinimore 2020).

***Son of a bitch.*** A harsh sexism that some women use to insult men. It can be avoided.

***You mother/father fucker.*** Vulgar sexist term that women and even men use in anger to demean and hurt somebody. It can be avoided.

***She is a useless girl*** (A sexist insult which men and women use in Nigeria). For example, when a girl or woman disappoints a man, as in being sexually unfaithful, something men do habitually, they describe the girl as *useless* and good-for-nothing. On the other hand, when a man disappoints a woman and breaks off from a sexual relationship, the girl feel used and dumped and they start winning that the man has ‘used and dumped’ them, an admittance of inferiority complex on the part of the woman involved. Why would a woman who consented to a failed sexual relationship which she enjoyed for a while says that she was used and dumped? Could all relationship end in marriage? Instead of this expression, “we have broken up” is a better alternative.

***I paid your bride price or head money.*** Many a time, when couples have a misunderstanding, or when women are (un)reasonably defiant, men often remind them of the fact that they paid their bride price, or sometimes, *head money*. By implication, the woman has been sold by her parents and bought by the man to be ordered around and abused; and she must obey. Indeed, the very act of paying bride price, especially exorbitant amounts, should be reconsidered, though it is not the focus of this paper.

***Ordinary woman*** (Okoronkwo 2020). Some men use this expression to downgrade women Even when they achieve feats that deserve some commendation. For instance, a male colleague once taunted another male colleague who lost an election to a female colleague in this way: “Please, keep quite when real men are talking. You that an ORDINARY WOMAN beat with 150 votes!”

***(She is a) public dog/whore/slut ( ):*** it is a derogatory hostile sexist metaphor for a woman who keeps multiple sex partners. Why not just state the fact? ‘She keeps multiple sex partners’.

***Milk factory:*** A derogatory hostile term used to describe busty (heavy-breasted) women.

### **Benevolent Sexisms**

***Men are the head of the family.*** Even though it is necessary for any social set up to have a head, some men use this benevolent sexist expression to browbeat their marital partners to accept their orders and disdain, no matter what, even when the wife is obviously the more intelligent, organised and far-sighted and so should lead.

**Sweet sixteen.** A seemingly benevolent sexist expression that older men use to flatter teenagers whom they harass or coax for sex.

**Please, be a man. Men don't cry.** A seemingly benevolent sexist term used to buoy up men's courage, especially when a man is bereaved or heat by a misfortune and is about to cry. The impression here is that strong men do not cry; only women do. Is this true? Crying when bereaved is natural and healing to the soul and mind.

**A portable babe.** A seemingly benevolent sexist expression for petite girl which the male user of the term considers good to travel with or flexible for sex. The expression sexually objectifies women and so should be avoided.

**Behind every successful man is a woman.** Although this aphorism was originally coined to stress the supportive and indispensable roles of women in the family unit, some men have now added sexist meanings to it. Such men use it to underscore their belief that a woman should be behind a man, never in front, even when it is obvious that the woman has more natural and intellectual endowment to lead the man in marriage and the society. It can be modified or presented as 'a successful man or woman/wife or husband has the support and love of his or her partner.'

### **Sexisms in Naija**

Naija is a less sexist language than English in grammar and social interaction. Most of the sexisms in Nigerian Pidgin are borrowed and translated from English and other Nigerian languages. All the examples depicted above can also be translated into Pidgin. In fact, Pidgin speakers also use them daily; for example, *na fish/toad sens wimen dem get*. However, Naija does not have elaborate pronoun declensions/cases for gender; for instance, *E don giv am di tin*, or *Im don giv am di tin* (Naija) could mean *he has given her the thing*, or *she has given him the thing*, or *she/he has given it the thing*, depending on the context of use. The subjective pronoun case 'e' or 'im' in Pidgin denotes *he*, *she* and *it* in English. Pidgin uses *am*, *in* and *im* for English *him*, *her*, *her*, *his* and *its* respectively.

As in English, animal nouns, particularly human beings, are marked for gender; for example, *father/mother* (English), *papa/mama* (Pidgin). But in lower mammals, the pattern are sometimes radically different. Just one form may be used to mark both genders. For example, *ox* and *cow* (English) are simply *nama/lama* or *cow* in Nigerian Pidgin; *buck* and *doe* (English) are *dia* (deer) in Pidgin, and *lion/lioness* are *layon* for both male and female in Pidgin. But there is *he-goat/she-goat*, *ram/sheep*, *cock/hen* in both languages.

In general language use, many sexist expressions abound in Naija, some of which are presented here.

### **Unintended, Exclusive, Subtle Sexisms**

**Man mos wak** (Man must eat). Here man is intended to denote man and woman, which

is sexist. *Pesin mos chop/wak* is suggested here as a more gender-sensitive alternative.

**Wetin man go do na?** (What can a man do in this case?). This is a sexist rhetorical question with a deep meaning in Pidgin. It is used to call the listener's attention to the speaker's state of helplessness and resignation to fate: *We trai, trai, trai but mai papa still kpeme. Wetin man go do?* ('We tried to save him but my father still died. Are we not helpless?').

**Na wuman get kichin** (Kitchen belongs to woman). The expression appears benevolent to women, but underneath, it is the source of men's disengagement from kitchen chores such as cooking, dishing foods, and washing cutlery and utensils. On the one hand, the expression warns others not to interfere in the woman's affairs and touch meals in the kitchen, which seems respectful to one's wife; but on the other hand, the belief makes men abandon all kitchen chores for their wives.

**Man no dai man no rotin** (*Until a man dies, he cannot decay/rot*). This Pidgin proverb admits a universal fact in a language that exclude the women or supposes that *man* refers to both sexes. 'If pesin no dai pesin no go rotin' is more gender-sensitive.

**Rons-gel/rons beyb.** A tenny coinage for girls who sleep with men to make money to survive. They are also called *slay queens/slay mama*. The idea here is that they can do anything to get a rich men and dress sexily to kill or seduce rich men. Although this depicts what they do, it should not be used to address them directly.

### **Hash, Hostile Examples**

**Bush mu/bush meat.** Men use this metaphor to describe village girls who are not sophisticated, who can easily be manipulated in a relationship. As one eats bush meat, so are they easy to have. Another term used for them is 'village babe', which is less derogatory. However, we can avoid these expressions and describe them with respect: 'My humble girl from the village'. 'My understanding girl' or 'cooperative, simple girlfriend'.

**Na Donatus.** Donatus is a coinage for a woman or man who keep multiple sex partners and falls for anyone that ask them for sex either for money or the pleasure of it.

**(Na) wuman rapa** (a woman's cloth or wrapper). Woman rapa (from English wrapper), is a metaphor which women use to describe a man who is at their beck and call, whom they can control and manipulate easily without resistance, as they do to their wrapper or cloth. Men also use the term to describe such men. The subtle danger in this sexism is that men often consciously and unconsciously want to prove to women that they are strong-minded, thereby making them to treat women harshly.

**Opio/okpo.** A pidgin word borrowed from local languages to denote a prostitute, a woman who sells sex openly. Although it is derogatory, one cannot easily suggest what they should be called.



**Lepa(cious).** *Lepa* is Pidgin coinage for a very slim, skinny or thin girl whom men regard as not sexy. But this is just some men's outlook. The opposite is number ten below

**Orobo(kibo).** It is an onomatopoeic epithet which people use for a girl or woman who is very fat and so clumsy for certain social and heterosexual activities. This expression and belief may make those who use it to avoid them or treat them with disdain.

**Men na toy for wimen hand/wimen na toy for men hand** (Men are toys in the hands of women/Women are toys in the hands of men). Some Nigerians at times use this assertion to describe men or women and this assertion goes a long way to influence their attitude to the opposite sex. It unconsciously makes them ride rough shod on the men or women as the case may be. Indeed, it is not true that men or women are toys in any one's hands in any context.

**Na man dey spend for wuman** (Men are to spend on women). This subtle and unintentional linguistic sexism is entrenched not only in Nigerian Pidgin but also in Nigerian languages and Nigerian English. Although this assertion reaffirms men's habit of taking care of women, it has overtime made females believe that they should not spend on men no matter how rich they may be and men then go to any length to make money to spend on women. It is the cause of women's attitude to their partner's money and their own money in relationships. Hardly will some female partners spend on their male partners. A typical Nigerian girl expects her male partner to spend on her, take her out and shower her with gifts and money all the time, hardly the other way round. This maxim is a notional stereotype that cause unintentional economic sexism against men, just as the notion that 'a woman's place is in the kitchen' makes most Nigerian men avoid going to the kitchen and cooking for their family because society believes it is the woman's domestic chore. Fortunately, the trend is changing slowly now.

## Summary, Findings and Conclusion

The paper presented fifty-six linguistic sexism in Nigerian English and Pidgin, thirty-three examples under Nigerian English, thirteen under Nigerian Pidgin. The paper also explained the implications of the examples identified for social interaction and presented alternative gender-sensitive expressions where necessary and possible. It established that many benevolent, harsh and unintended sexism are used in the two codes studied, as summarised in table 1 here:

Socio-Psychological Types	Frequency	Percentage
1. NigE unintended Sexisms	15	27%
2. NigE harsh/hurting sexism	18	32%
3. NigE benevolent/subtle sexism	10	18%
4. NigP unintended Sexisms	05	9%
5. NigP harsh/hurting sexism	08	14%
6. NigP benevolent/subtle sexism	---	---
<b>Total</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>100%</b>

As shown in table 1 above, hurting sexism is more in NigE (18 examples constituting 32% and also in NigP (8 examples constituting 14%). This is closely followed by unintended sexism: 15 examples (27%) in English and 5 (9%) in Pidgin. The benevolent types are the least with 10 examples (18%) in NigE. The table also clearly shows that sexism is more in NigE than in NigP.

Against this backdrop, we underscore the imperative of using gender-sensitive expressions, as Menegatti and Rubini (2017) caution that people should change their sexist linguistic attitudes and appreciate the value and positive effects of using gender-sensitive expressions. The trend in writing and speaking globally today is using gender-inclusive language. Even though we sometimes use sexist expressions unconsciously because they have become entrenched in our languages, we can consciously desexify our idiolects. How can this be achieved? We can avoid using *she, her, women, girls, ladies, widows*, etc. all through our works because we are female, or *he, his, him, man, mankind, master*, etc. because we are male. We should rather use gender-sensitive and inclusive expressions such as *her/him, him or her, him or her, they, them, their, humankind* instead of *mankind, ladies and gentlemen*, etc. Words such as *widow, conductor, poet, actor, governor, author, usher*, etc. should be redefined in the lexicon to denote both sexes, no need for further affixation a tiny *-er, -or, -ass*, etc. to denote female such as *widower, actress*, etc. Is it not possible to do away with female bound morphemes in English? Should a female graduate with a first and/or second degree(s) not be addressed as *Spinster of Arts, or Science, and Mistress or Lady of Arts, or Science* instead of *Bachelor and Master*?

Also, in child up-bringing and language in education, parents, teachers and learners should strive to use gender-sensitive and gender-inclusive language. A gender-inclusive language caters for the interests of all sexes and genders while a gender-sensitive language ensures that we do not use language to insult, demean and commonise the opposite sex, lesbians, homosexuals, and transgenders simply because of their natural or social gender and sexual orientations. Religions, some holy (?) books and primitive cultures have helped to reduce women to inferior and vulnerable second-hand positions in some societies where men use *argumentum ad verecundiam*: appeal to the authorities of the Bible, Koran, Shrines, gods, goddesses, hell, heaven, etc. to oppress and abuse wo/men. God is always 'He', not 'She'. It is the 'Son of God', no 'Daughter of God,' who saved humanity. The socio-intellectual moves to desexify our languages should be encouraged and sustained at home, in academics, education, politics, writing, in the religions especially, and in the documentation of Nigerian languages. It will be very effective to include teaching of sexist, gender-sensitive and gender-inclusive expressions in tertiary institution General Study course entitled 'The Use of English' and 'Conflict Resolution' in order to raise awareness, which is still generally very low, and to empower language users to use gender-sensitive expressions.

One of the most apposite and beautiful analogies and symbolisms about the symbiosis and importance of men and women in society was once used by Jane Osagie, a socio-political and gender activist in Benin in 2011 during the 40th anniversary of *Hotel de Jordan* at NTA, Benin. She said that 'society is like a bird with two wings, one wing represents the females and the other represents the males. Cut off one of the wings and then the bird cannot fly.' We believe that this conceit aptly captures and underscores human gender interdependence and social relevance. Apart from naturally assigned roles, it is hard to identify a role, chore or

responsibility that a man can do that a woman cannot. Hence, women now chant the dictum: 'Anything a man can do, a woman can do (even better)', and please we should make it vice versa for gender balance: 'Anything a woman can do, a man can also do (even better)'.

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