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## Sexism in Nigerian English

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**Abstract:** This study explores how gender prejudice appears in linguistic practice and the prevalence of sexism in the English language among educated Nigerians. The usage of sexist language, such as gender exclusive phrases, stereotyped portrayals, and the reinforcement of established gender norms. The research applies qualitative and quantitative methods using a sample of 250 educated Nigerians in its analysis, which is done by collecting data from questionnaires. Text analysis of written resources, including scholarly articles, official documents, and media releases, was used to gather information from a sample of educated English speakers in Nigeria. Feminist linguistic theory is used as the theoretical framework that guides the research. This theory talks about the verbal patterns that uphold gender inequality. The findings show that sex languages persist, despite increased awareness and efforts to prevent them among educated Nigerians. The study shows that while the English language, as spoken by educated Nigerians and others, mirrors broader worldwide trends in gendered language, purposeful linguistic change is still required to achieve gender inclusion. This study will contribute to the ongoing discourse about language and sex inequality in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Educated Nigerian English, Feminist Linguistic Theory, Gender Bias, Language Reform, Sexism

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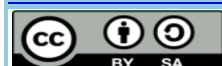
### 1. Introduction

Sexism is a pervasive social issue that commonly shows up in language use, particularly in professional and educational settings. The pervasiveness of both open and implicit sexism in Nigerian English has influenced gender dynamics and cultural norms. Language, as the primary medium of communication, is not isolated; rather, it is closely related to the cultural practices and sociopolitical views of its speakers. The forms and patterns of English as it is spoken in Nigeria reflect both the nation's colonial past and the persistent patriarchal traditions that influence many aspects of Nigerian life. Since many educated people in Nigeria use English as their primary language of communication in formal settings, it is important to look at the prevalence of sexism in this educated variety of English in order to understand how language either supports or contradicts gender inequality (Ordu & Odukwu, 2024).

Scholars and academics have long argued that language plays a crucial role in the creation and upkeep of gender roles in society. According to Lakoff (1975), sexism in language perpetuates the marginalization of minorities and women by mirroring broader cultural perceptions of them. Lakoff's findings apply to educated Nigerians' English, whose linguistic choices often reveal unconscious or intentional gender biases, even though a significant amount of her work focuses on American English. According to Cameron (1992), language is inherently political because it serves as a medium for communicating social power dynamics, including gender inequality. Gendered modes of communication are still promoted, often unconsciously, by Nigeria's educated elite, who are often the role models for language use in society at large. The two main sexes are sharply divided in Nigerian society, which is patriarchal, in every aspect of both individual and group life. According to Eniola (2018), Nigeria is a highly gender-stratified society where men despise women for playing a supporting role. Despite the fact that sexism is more prevalent against women in this patriarchal society, recent developments and idioms indicate that this trend is shifting in a number of ways. Although these queer aspects of sexuality are not the subject of this paper, men are also becoming victims of various forms of

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sexism in many sociocultural contexts that are frequently disregarded. "Hostile sexism" is directed at lesbians, homosexuals, and transgender/transsexual people.

Language is used to conceptualize and spread sexism, which arises from ideas and sociocultural constructs. A study of sexism in Nigeria should start with language sexism since ideas and thoughts are abstract and frequently materialized in language and behavior. One notable instance of sexism in Educated Nigerian English is the widespread use of male pronouns and phrases to refer to both men and women. By rendering them invisible in linguistic terms, this marginalizes women. Examples of how deeply ingrained patriarchy is in both Nigerian society and the English language include the use of "man" to refer to all of humanity and the default usage of "he" when the gender is unclear. This linguistic anomaly is more pronounced in cultures where traditional gender norms are still prevalent, even though it is not unique to Nigeria. Achebe (1985) asserts that women are typically relegated to supporting roles in both language and society, and that language in Nigeria typically reflects social structures, including gender. Furthermore, another way that sexism manifests itself in Nigerian English is through the gendering of specific roles or professions. Words like "secretary" or "nurse" are often implicitly associated with women, whereas words like "doctor" or "engineer" are presumed to refer to men. This occupational stereotyping not only reflects linguistic constraints placed on women's aspirations, but it also reflects cultural norms regarding appropriate roles for men and women. According to Afolayan (1995), these linguistic constructions restrict women's perceived competence in specific professional domains, thereby perpetuating gender inequality.

Furthermore, women are consistently underrepresented in important roles in the academic sector, which is where the educated elite primarily operate, both in terms of language use and actual participation. According to Okon (2001), women's professional titles, like "Miss" or "Mrs.," frequently emphasize their marital status, in contrast to men's titles, which are neutral and unrelated to personal life ("Mr." or "Dr."). This distinction subtly supports the notion that men are evaluated only on the basis of their professional abilities, whereas women's identities are inextricably linked to their relationships with men, whether they be familial or marital. Rather than merely reflecting outdated social mores, the use of discriminatory terminology and idioms in Educated Nigerian English is a true example of Nigeria's ongoing struggle for gender equality. As more women enter the workforce and enroll in school, the need for gender-neutral terminology grows. In light of this, linguistic experts and feminists have both called for modifications to language use to avoid perpetuating stereotypes or favoring one gender over another. \

According to Spender (1980), language has historically been molded to reflect and uphold male domination because it is a man-made construct. In order to achieve full gender equality, it is imperative that efforts be made to make language less sexist and more inclusive. The pervasiveness of sexism in educated Nigerian English serves as a complex mirror of the broader gender dynamics in Nigerian society. The connection between language and gender demonstrates how educated Nigerians use English to either consciously or unconsciously uphold social norms that disadvantage women. Scholars such as Lakoff, Bamgbose, and Afolayan have provided valuable insights into how language both reflects and perpetuates power imbalances. Consequently, fostering a more equal society necessitates an understanding of and dedication to addressing the ways in which sexism appears in language. As Nigerian society evolves and more women assume significant roles in education and governance, the language used by the educated elite must promote gender equality and inclusivity.

## **2. Literature review**

The issue of sexism in language, particularly in Nigerian English, has received a lot of scholarly attention. Many scholars have examined how language perpetuates gender stereotypes, marginalizes women, and supports patriarchy in formal and informal contexts. This review discusses significant works that address sexism in language, particularly as it relates to educated Nigerian English, and places this issue within a broader body of global scholarship on linguistic sexism.

### **2.1. Language and Gender: A Global Overview**

According to Menegatti and Rubini (2017), language is a very subtle tool of intentional and unintentional discrimination against women. Lesbians, gays, transgender individuals, and men should also be included. Language is the first medium of sexism. In order to demonstrate how sex and gender prejudice are embedded "in the grammatical and syntactical rules of different languages" and "the extent to which a language" perpetuates gender discrimination, Stahlberg et al. (2013) offer three categories of languages. Grammatical gender languages, natural gender languages, and genderless languages are among them. They assert that lexical terms such as "women," "sister," "father," or "man" that distinguish between the sexes are present in all three categories.

But for genderless languages (like Finnish and Turkish), which lack grammatical gender for nouns and personal pronouns, this is the only sex-marking. Since there is no grammatical marking of sex in natural gender languages (such as English and Scandinavian languages), the majority of nouns and their dependent linguistic forms (adjectives, pronouns, and articles) can be used to refer to both males and females. Personal pronouns are the primary means of expressing gender in these languages. All nouns in grammatical gender languages (such as French, Italian, and German) are given either a feminine, masculine, or neutral gender, and dependent parts of speech carry grammatical agreement to the corresponding noun's gender. The sea, for example, is feminine in French (*la mer*) and masculine in Italian (*il mare*). Furthermore, the grammatical and syntactical rules of these languages are constructed so that feminine nouns and adjectives are frequently identified as deriving from their corresponding masculine form. Likewise,

pronouns and masculine nouns are frequently employed with a generic function, meaning they can be used to refer to both men and women.

One of the foundational works in the study of language and gender is Robin Lakoff's 1975 study, *Research on the Use of Gendered Language and Woman's Place*. According to Lakoff (1975), women's language reflects their lower social standing through hedging, politeness, and the use of tag questions. According to Lakoff, the marginalization of women in various sociocultural contexts is both reflected in and sustained by these linguistic features. Her writings sparked debates about whether women's language is naturally less aggressive or if it is a conscious adaptation to social norms. Deborah Tannen's *You Just Don't Understand* (1990), which builds on Lakoff's work, examines how men and women communicate differently. According to Tannen, men and women are socialized to have distinct conversational patterns; women prioritize closeness and connection, while men frequently speak in terms of status and independence. Tannen's paradigm, which is founded on a "difference" perspective, sees gendered language as a result of differing societal expectations rather than as lacking.

**2.1.1 Critique of the Deficit and Difference Models** When compared to Shaw's work from the past 20 years, the Deficit and Difference models proposed by Tannen and Lakoff are out of date. Cameron contends in her 2007 book *The Myth of Mars and Venus* that there is little to no difference in communication between men and women. Cameron claims that binary gender classifications typically ignore agency, power, and context when using language. She emphasizes that language is a tool that people use to negotiate their identities rather than merely reflecting rigid gender norms.

There is intricacyethos, similar to that found in Eckert and McConnell-Ginet's *Language and Gender* (2003), which argues sociologically about gender constructions and illustrates the complexityethos of gender language use. According to Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003), language is used to express social norms of gender, whether they are positive or negative, proving that gender is languaged. This position has been one of the most significant in the field of social science since the incorporation of Judah Butler's performativity paradigm (1990), which has expanded views to view gender as situational and not constant.

**2.1.2 Intersectionality in Language and Gender Studies** Additionally, the study's focus has broadened to encompass how gender interacts with other social categories like race, class, and sexual orientation. *The Domestication of English in Nigeria* (2004) by Babalola and Awonusi, which examines the connection between language and gender identity, is a significant work in this field. They contend that gender cannot be understood in isolation because it is always mediated by other aspects of identity.

This is the case with Zentella's (1997) work on Latino/a language and identity, which demonstrates how language use among Latina women in the US is influenced by gender and ethnicity. By claiming that Latina women use language as a tool to respond to the socially constructed conditions of femininity and to express their cultural heritage, Zentella argues for an intersectional analysis of language and gender.

**2.1.3 Global Perspectives on Language and Gender.** Progressive gender ideologies emerged in the very late 20th century, especially among Western circles, including American popular culture, according to research on transgenderism and fluid sexuality. Gal's (1989) study on Eastern European languages examines how socialism affects women's speech, while Holmes' (1992) *New Zealand* shows how women wield power in the corporate world. These observations support the findings of these studies, which show that local politics and culture are important when examining language and gender.

In *The Sociolinguistics of Identity*, Omoniyi and White (2006) present an African perspective and analyze how gender, language, and identity interact from the perspective of indigenous languages and how they affect gender relations. They contend that gender relations have long been distorted by the colonial language policy, especially with regard to women, who have experienced double subordination as a result of linguistic and gender colonialism in many African societies.

**2.1.4 Queer Linguistics and Non-Binary Gender:** The use of language in non-binary and queer societies is also important for current research. Gaudio's 2003 book *Language, Sexuality, and Power: Studies in Intersectional Sociolinguistics* explores the creative language use of LGBTQ+ communities and non-binary individuals to subvert gender norms. The emerging field of queer linguistics emphasizes how language contributes to the formation of non-normative gender identities and questions the binary conception of gendered language.

## **2.2. Educated Nigerian English and Gender Bias**

Issues that have affected educated Nigerian English and pidgin, a dialect of English influenced by indigenous languages and cultures, since the dawn of Nigerian society include sexism. According to Odeunmi (2008), the way gender is expressed in Nigerian English reflects the fatherhood structure of many Nigerian towns and communities. The way masculine generics like "chairman," "mankind," and "manpower" are used, for example, shows how Nigerian English reflects the androcentric linguistic tendencies present in many languages worldwide. As scholars like Adegbija (2004) have pointed out, these gendered language forms are not neutral; rather, they actively seek to prevent the female gender from appearing physical in both public and private contexts. In academic and professional contexts, where honorifics and titles usually favor male language over their feminine gender, this is particularly apparent. For instance, the persistent use of "Mr." as the default term in official contexts, even when the referent's gender is female, reinforces male dominance in educated Nigerian English discourse.

### **2.3. Representation of Women in Nigerian Textbooks and Media**

One of the areas where sexism in Nigerian English and pidgin is most evident is in the academic setting. In a study on gender representation in Nigerian secondary school textbooks, Okon (2010) discovered that women were significantly underrepresented in both writing content and physical form. Men were depicted as professionals, leaders, and decision-makers, while women, when they did appear, were usually portrayed in stereotypically subservient roles, such as housewives or caregivers. The gender inequality ingrained in the Nigerian language and society is not only reflected in this biased portrayal, but it is also maintained. Similarly, sexist language is disseminated by the media, another powerful socializing force. According to Aina and Odeunmi (2012), sexist language is still employed in Nigerian media, particularly in news reporting and advertising, to depict women as objects of beauty and domesticity rather than as strong people or agents of change. The idea that women's participation in particular professions is special and thus requires qualification is reinforced by the use of diminutives, such as "lady doctors" or "female engineers."

### **2.4. Linguistic Sexism and Intersectionality in Nigeria**

Linguistic sexism—discrimination embedded in language that perpetuates gender inequality—has been the subject of scholarly investigation, especially in patriarchal societies. Linguistic sexism and intersectionality issues are closely related in Nigeria, where multiple ethnic groups and languages coexist. By examining how language both reflects and reinforces social inequalities based on socioeconomic status, gender, and ethnicity, this literature review explores the relationship between linguistic sexism and intersectionality in Nigeria.

It is crucial to comprehend the ways in which sexism in Nigerian English interacts with other forms of social oppression, including colonial history, class, and ethnicity. According to Wood (1966), Nigeria's linguistic landscape and contemporary gender relations have been shaped by the country's colonial past, which included Eurocentric gender ideology and the English language. Linguistic sexism is found in Nigerian languages themselves, according to scholars like Oluremi (2015), suggesting that the issue is not solely a colonial import but is also intertwined with indigenous patriarchal systems. Recent studies have also examined the connection between digital environments and language sexism in Nigeria. New language usage patterns that both challenge and support traditional gender norms have emerged as a result of social media and digital communication. Adetunji (2020) asserts that although digital platforms offer Nigerian women new avenues for self-expression and resistance to patriarchal norms, they are also sites where sexist language is prevalent, often manifested as cyberbullying and the exclusion of female voices from online discussions.

### **2.5. Efforts at Gender-Neutral Language Reform in Nigerian English**

In response to the pervasive sexism in language, gender-neutral language has been promoted both domestically and globally. According to Cameron (2005), many English-speaking countries are switching to gender-neutral terminology, such as replacing "chairman" with "chairperson" and "policeman" with "police officer." It has taken longer for these reforms to gain traction in Nigeria than in other parts of the world because traditional gender roles are still deeply embedded there. Gender-neutral terminology is currently being used by some media outlets. Even though more people are realizing the need for inclusive language, Agbodike (2014) argues that resistance is still strong, particularly from older generations and those in positions of authority who believe the changes are unnecessary or even disrespectful to Nigerian cultural values. The debate over gender equality and the role that language plays in either maintaining or upending the status quo is reflected in this opposition.

Sexism in educated Nigerian English is a reflection of larger cultural norms and attitudes that have been influenced by both native patriarchal institutions and colonial legacies. Notwithstanding notable advancements in the use of gender-neutral language, especially in scholarly and media settings, much more needs to be done to eliminate the ingrained gender biases in Nigerian English. Future research should examine the connections between language, gender, and power in Nigeria, with an emphasis on the ways in which internet platforms and younger generations are altering the linguistic landscape.

## **3. Research methodology**

With a sample size of 250 educated Nigerians, this study uses a mixed method approach that combines descriptive and prescriptive methodologies to investigate the rise in sexism in Educated Nigerian English (ENE). The research is guided by feminist linguistics, which challenges and dismantles gendered patterns in language to demonstrate how language perpetuates fatherly ideas and gender inequality. The study employs a descriptive design and is based on the observation, identification, and analysis of sexist items in educated Nigerian English as used by various educated speakers in various environmental contexts. Without changing any variables, this approach is suitable for methodically describing the linguistic patterns and qualities.

Among the many types of data that will be collected for this project are written texts, in-person interviews, and everyday language use among educated Nigerians. Sources will include government documents, corporate correspondence, news reports, academic journals, and other formal and informal correspondence. The choice of these resources guarantees a comprehensive examination of the language used by educated Nigerians in both public and private contexts. To learn more about how gendered language is viewed and used in everyday interactions, semi-structured interviews with Nigerian academics, professionals, and students will also be undertaken. In addition to speakers' own perceptions of gender bias, this will enable the inclusion of both overt and covert instances of sexism in language.

The collected data will be subjected to qualitative and descriptive content analysis in order to categorize the gender bias. Special attention will be paid to lexical items, syntactic structures, and pragmatic usage that reflect gender

stereotyping, asymmetry, and male-centered language practices. The study will examine how gendered language manifests in formal and informal ENE contexts.

### 3.1. Theoretical framework

Feminist linguistic theory serves as the study's cornerstone and will be applied as a lens to analyze and interpret the data. Scholars like Deborah Cameron, Sara Mills, and Robin Lakoff, who argue that language is fundamentally biased against women because it reflects societal power structures, will be specifically cited in the study. The theory will guide the investigation of how sexism operates in ENE by revealing basic gender beliefs embedded in language forms. This study uses feminist linguistic theory to investigate how language, especially among educated speakers, subtly upholds patriarchal norms in Nigerian society. The framework will also help in proposing ways to challenge and reform these sexist tendencies in ENE to foster more inclusive and egalitarian language use.

### 3.2. Research questions

The following questions guided the research

1. What societal gender roles and biases are reflected and reinforced by gender-exclusive terms in Nigerian English today?
2. How do cultural, gender, and ethnic biases in Nigerian society get reflected and reinforced by stereotypical representations in the English language used in Nigeria?
3. How do lexical choices, expressions, and discourse patterns in daily communication in Nigerian English perpetuate traditional gender roles?

### 3.3. Objectives of the research

1. To determine and examine how gender-exclusive terms in modern Nigerian English reflect and reinforce societal gender roles and biases.
2. To investigate how stereotypical representations in Nigerian English reflect and perpetuate cultural, gender, and ethnic stereotypes in Nigerian society.
3. To look into the ways that commonplace Nigerian English discourse patterns, lexical choices, and expressions support the maintenance of traditional gender roles.

## 4. Findings and discussions

The issue of sexism in educated Nigerian English is one that is well-suited for linguistic study because language both reflects and upholds social gender norms. The information for this study was gathered through interviews with educated English speakers in Nigeria and text analysis of written materials, including academic journals, official documents, and media outlets. This approach shows how sexism is embedded in the discourse of educated Nigerians, often unwittingly reinforcing gender inequality.

**Table 1:** Analysis of Gender-Exclusive Terms in Nigerian English (N= 250 Respondents)

Response Category	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Aware and frequently use	80	32%
Aware but avoid using	70	28%
Unaware but use unconsciously	60	24%
Not aware at all	40	16%
Total	250	100%

Table 1 demonstrates a discrepancy between linguistic awareness and usage, as most respondents (60%) are aware of gender-exclusive terms in Nigerian English, but a sizable portion (24%) continue to use them unintentionally. One of the most obvious instances of sexist language in the data is the use of gender-exclusive terms, which are words or phrases that favor one gender over the other, often at the expense of women. For example, many official documents still use titles more suited for men, like chairman, police officer, spokesman, and businessman, even when a woman occupies a high-ranking position.

The headline of a news article about a female leader's performance said, "The Chairman's Remarkable Achievements." The gender-exclusive term "chairman" was used even though the position was held by a woman. Chairperson or chair is a non-sexist substitute that is gender-neutral and uses more inclusive language. Interviewees frequently acknowledged using these terms without thinking about their sexist connotations, especially men. However, even when these terms were used indirectly, female respondents reported feeling excluded or marginalized.

#### Academic papers:

Words like "manpower" or "mankind" are still frequently used in academic writing. Although these terms are frequently used out of habit, an examination of numerous papers revealed that they subtly support the notion that men are the default or norm Figure 1. Although they are available, alternatives like workforce and humankind are not as commonly used, suggesting that Nigerian academic writing needs to consciously reform its language.

**Table 2:** Analysis of Stereotypical Representations in Nigerian English. (N=250)

Response Category	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Recognize and challenged such representations	65	26%
Acknowledge but consider them culturally normal	90	36%
Unaware of their existence	55	22%
Agree and reinforce such stereotypes	40	16%
Total	250	100%

There is widespread acceptance of gendered stereotypes in language use, as shown in Table 2, where 62% of respondents either acknowledge or reinforce stereotypical representations in Nigerian English, but only 26% actively challenge them.

**Table 3:** Analysis of Reinforcement of Traditional Gender Roles in Nigerian English

Response Category	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Language strongly reinforces traditional gender roles	100	40%
Language sometimes reinforces such roles	85	34%
Language is neutral regarding gender roles	40	16%
Language challenges traditional gender roles	25	10%
Total	250	100%

According to Table 3, the vast majority of respondents (74%) think that Nigerian English upholds traditional gender roles, indicating that the language frequently reflects and upholds prevailing social norms. Stereotypical representations of gender roles were prevalent in both spoken and written literature. One common expression of these representations is the notion that certain traits or roles are fundamentally male or female. For instance, conversations about jobs or social responsibilities typically adhered to predetermined gender norms.

When asked about his career goals in one interview, a male respondent stated, "Women usually prefer jobs like teaching or nursing because they are more patient and nurturing." This claim supports the myth that men are better suited for technical or leadership positions, while women are inherently better suited for caregiving occupations.

**Official documents:**

Men are frequently portrayed as decision-makers or providers in government publications and policy documents, while women are portrayed as caregivers or passive recipients of support. One document discussing programs to reduce poverty, for example, mentioned "empowering men to take on leadership roles in their communities" and "supporting women with resources to care for their families." The scope of gender equality is constrained by this framing, which perpetuates the stereotype of men as leaders and women as supporters.

**Media publications:**

These gendered stereotypes are also reflected in media coverage. For instance, in sports reporting, male athletes are frequently characterized as strong, tough, or dominant, whereas female athletes are described as elegant, graceful, or beautiful. Even when the male and female athletes are carrying out the same physical tasks, these linguistic disparities serve to reinforce traditional gender roles.

**5. Conclusion**

A broader sociocultural reality where gender biases are prevalent in language use and communication patterns is reflected in the prevalence of sexism in educated Nigerian English. Despite Nigeria's industrialization and advancements in education, gender inequality is still subtly present in the country through language choices that favor men over women. The dominant use of masculine pronouns in general allusions, gendered occupational phrases, and the traditional representation of women in social roles all contribute to the marginalization of women in the discourse. This study has demonstrated that sexist language patterns continue to exist even in the context of educated Nigerian English, where people are supposed to demonstrate a higher level of linguistic consciousness. This suggests that a more conscious and intentional effort is required to challenge and alter the ingrained patriarchal attitudes reflected in language, as formal education alone is insufficient to eradicate sexist language habits. These linguistic biases are also frequently reinforced by the media and educational system, which frequently reinforce culturally acceptable stereotypes and traditional gender roles.

Understanding how language, a powerful tool for communication, influences our perception of the world is essential. Because it reinforces negative gender stereotypes, persistent use of sexist language may hinder efforts to attain gender equality. Legislators, linguists, and educators must work together to promote language use that is either gender-neutral or gender-inclusive. Sensitization campaigns, curriculum changes, and campaigns to raise awareness of the importance of inclusive language in everyday communication could all help achieve this. The sexism in Educated Nigerian English reveals a linguistic imbalance that stems from Nigeria's broader social structure. To solve this issue, a conscious shift in terminology and behavior regarding gender equality is needed. Achieving gender-sensitive language use is a significant step in eradicating gender prejudices in society because it will foster an environment where men and women can

engage in and benefit equally from language and social interactions. To build a more inclusive and egalitarian society, it is necessary to challenge the underlying ideologies in addition to altering linguistic patterns.

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## 8. Contribution

Understanding how language use reflects and perpetuates gender inequality in Nigerian society is made easier by research on sexism in Nigerian English. It reveals stereotypes, gender-exclusive language, and biased expressions that are present in public discourse, media, education, and daily communication. The study supports continuous initiatives for gender equity and inclusive communication in Nigeria by bringing attention to these linguistic patterns and encouraging gender-sensitive language use.

## 9. Recommendation

Policies supporting gender-neutral language should be put in place by governmental bodies, academic institutions, and media outlets. The public should be made aware of the consequences of using sexist language through awareness campaigns. Promote the use of gender-neutral terminology in place of words with gender markings (for example, chairperson instead of chairman).

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