LANGUAGE AND GENDER IN NIGERIA: PERCEPTION, PATTERNS AND PROSPECTS

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Preamble:

A Tale of two Passions

Besides the reverence and worship of my
Creator
two Passions rule my being
the miracle of speech,
feminity, its force, frailty and fragrance
unlike the Road in the forest
my travelling both
has made the difference
these Siamese passions
cohere and co-habit in my Being
bravo to the wedlock

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I thank the Almighty God for today. It is amazing. It is real. Since I was promoted Professor about nine years ago. I had longed for today; the day to share my thoughts, my research, my experiences, my idiosyncrasies and many more.

As the rather self explanatory title of my lecture indicates the paper is delicately or is it deftly, balanced on two concepts - my dual passion. It is dipodic rather than 'tripodic'. It is usual to conceptualize and execute a 'tripodic' arrangement but at the end of our intellectual excursion, it should be clear that the dipodic arrangement is also wholesome, and may indeed be more natural given the circumstance of occurrence. Perhaps our starting point should be a cursory glance at the key concepts indicated in the title of the address. This may well be seen as opening of the dish and location, by sight, of the basic elements in it, preparatory to consumption.

1.   Language

Language, unfortunately is amongst the least understood concepts ever studied. Paradoxically virtually everyone believes they 'know' much, if not all about language. Some may even, in response to the challenge implicit in this assertion, rattle off in their mother language or any other to show their fluency and 'presumed' excellence in

language use. But does fluency in the use of a language constitute knowledge and effectiveness in the language? It is doubtful. Bloomfield, 1933 in a sound consideration of the issue of linguistic research and general assumptions about language, rendered a treatise that in all fair considerations has proved prophetic and confirmed over the years this dilemma of language learning, comprehension and use.
Bloomfield remarks

> The most difficult step in the study of language is the first step.
> Again and again scholarship has approached the study of language without actually entering upon it (Bloomfield, 1933 p.21)

What is this first step? One may ask. I would humbly submit that in my understanding the first step is the erroneous assumption that we know all about language. Bloomfield's Assertion came several years before the manifestation of Digitized language, that is computer language - yet another type of language. However, for the avoidance of doubt here this paper is focused more on human language (HL) and Human Language Technology (HLT) than other forms of language.

Generally, language may be defined as an arbitrary set Of codes used for communication. With this very broad definition of language, the concept becomes the habitat of strange bed fellows encompassing all sorts of codes that engender communication, animals' codes; insects' codes, signs; digitized codes, human language codes etc. But we know that the human language is significantly different from the other codes. For one thing the codes are vocal.
Then, perhaps a modification of the earlier definition could make the difference and specify our HL. We then try a modified version:
Language is an arbitrary set of vocal codes used for communication.
We would soon note that our new definition has been seen in some quarters as suspect. The word arbitrary in this context had been queried, with some language scholars of 19th and early 20th century contending that there is hardly any arbitrariness in language as they argue that there is a close link between an item and what it is called.
While some of the arguments may today sound ridiculous, given the wholesome input from Linguistics, during that period it was no laughing matter. The proponents of this theory quickly cite the occurrence of onomatopeas as key evidence for the link between the word and its referent. Hence the cooing of the cukoo; the 'wow wow' of the dog; 'miaow' of a cat. But they were hard put to it explaining why many other lexical items -- a legion as it were, do not correspond to this pattern. Even among those that are onomatopoeic, there are variations, the Igbo dog for instance barks 'gba-gba', while the French does not.
Perhaps a similar controversy, more or less complementing the one above is that of the origin of language. Apart from the biblical account there were a number of contentious claims. The inherent nature of language has not been spared in the attempt to 'enter upon its study'. It is largely upheld that language is a living organism - grows,

flourishes and is capable of dying as well. In this. respect the concepts, 'language' on the one hand and 'Dialect' on the other have attracted a lot of attention from various linguists and language scholars of different theoretical leanings. There were those who believed that language is simply a wholesome entity that should not and cannot strict I y speaking be decomposed into subsets, variants or dialects. The De Saussurean School holds the concept of dialect suspect . Their rather extreme reductionism does not accommodate the existence of dialect. They argue that phonemes[J] are distinctive only within the individual's speech, that is the idiolect[4]. The speech sound /i/ for instance is distinctive or contrastive in Mr. A's speech because it contrasts with say /u/ in his speech. It is therefore, inconceivable from this standpoint to conceptualize a dialed which implies the comparison of speech forms of groups of individuals. With the rather extensive evidence that in many languages, subsets or microcosms of the broader macrocosm, exist made the De Saussurean reductionism rather shortlived, li is apparent, and may even be said to be commonsensical that A and B in the following could not be, effectively argued, (o belong to different linguistic superstructures-languages.

English   **Igbo**
1. A   Come here [kAin his]   2. A   Anu'dirhma [anu$_r$ di$_r$ tf^ma] 'meat
is good' B   "   "   [kum his]   B   alu di mma [alu dj m ma]

3. Yoruba
A.   iyen ko daa [ijen ko daa)| 'that is not good'
 B.   eyiun ko daa [cjiu ko daa | 'that is not good'

For l.A would he typical of (he speaker of Southern British English (SEE) with the Received Pronunciation (RP) rendition, while B *of* lh;il number is typical of the Northern British English of the Yorkshire accent/pronunciation. For 2, the A would be typical of (he standard Igbo speaker or speakers of standard Igbo while the B would be typical of the Achi-Igbo speaker for instance, for 3 the A is typical of the standard Yoruba speaker wink- ihe B counterpart would be typical of Ibadan, Off a or i'cnerally Kwara speakers of Yoruba.
It is clear that even without any training in Linguistics one would rather confidently assert that A & B of each of the linguistic systems pointed out here can not belong to different languages. Their cohesion cannot be 'accidental'. To try to take into cognissance overwhelming evidence of similarities between variants of a language, the 'Overall Pattern' came into being. It is based on the concept of minimal pairs[5]. Proponents of the overall pattern hold that minimal pairs of individual phonemes when considered in their totality would account for all the differences or contrasts found in the speech of anyone speaker in a given language area or community. Although this approach was based mainly on the phonological parameter, which of course is not the only basis for the delineation of linguistic differences, it succeeded in providing a convincing establishment of "affinity" between the speech of people from a common language background; and therefore argued for the recognition of "similar languages within a language".

Uriel Weinreich's 1954 classical exposition Ts Structural Dialectology Possible' upholds the existence of languages within a language i.e. variants within a language but insists that there is a pattern to be followed to establish them. This ushered in the concept of Diasystem. An example of a diasystem is presented below.

Lang AI   Lang A$_2$
i   u   i   u
e   o   e   o
 sc   a

I mm the above Lang AI and Lang A$_2$ have four (4) vowels in common in the vocalic inventory.   The differing   vocalic segments are /a/ and /a?/.   In the diasystem principle their similarities and dissimilarities would be reflected thus

$$I \sim e = AI \quad [EC]$$
$$\frac{\qquad\qquad}{A_2 \quad [a]} \quad \sim o \sim u$$

While the diasystem is able to show differences and similarities between linguistic systems' languages, for instance, it raises a number of critical questions. For instance, must the similarities observed be within cognates in the linguistic varieties under consideration[6]. One could readily say 'yes' since any answer in the negative would yield very embarrassing results. Some languages such as Yiddish and Spanish have identical phonemic inventory // i ~ e ~ a ~ o ~ u// yet they are different languages. On the other hand, insistence that the similarities be within cognates would make it impossible for us to set up diasystems for linguistic systems that are to a large extent very similar. Moulton 1960 reports that two German dialects, spoken barely fifty miles apart, have only three phonemes in common, yet they are completely mutually intelligible.
The point of mutual intelligibility has often been used by language scholars and linguists in the establishment of affinity between linguistic varieties. It has often been overtly argued that for two or more speech varieties to be regarded as varieties/dialects of a language they must be mutually intelligible. This assumption, for instance has underlined many a work on the varieties of English language whether spoken in Britain/America/South Africa/Australia etc. This criterion of mutual intelligibility is not sacrosanct. Indeed Agard 1971 had this to say on the issue:
The factor of mutual intelligibility does not furnish a relevant criterion for differentiating dialect from language...mutual intelligibility is at best a matter of probability.
Alongside the structural/analytical principle for the establishment of the dialed or varieties of language are largely subjective descriptions. One of such submissions is found in Raven 1969.
...Note I use the term dialect where others might use some other term such as accent. This choice of term is basically an American one. In other parts of the world scholars would not use dialect for the speech of educated men and women; they

would restrict it to the speech of uneducated men and • women; they might not use it to describe the speech of a city but only that of rural areas, usually remote ones (see also Ikekeonwu, 1986)

Raven however presents his definition of dialect as ";inv habitual variety of a language, regional or social". These parting words of Raven 1969 appear to sum up the general perception of the concept of dialect by most linguists. Finally, as pointed out in Ikekeonwu 1986b, from the De Sausurean riddle which makes the dialect an elusive, non-starter, subsequent views agree to the existence of varieties within a language. These are generally called dialects.

Linguistics

Although De Saussaure, often accepted as the father of modern linguistics, missed the mark in the dialect conceptualization, many of his conceptual constructions in language study/analysis threw significant light on the nature and nurture of language. Subsequent scholars such as Leonard Bloomfield, Noam Chomsky, Morris Halle etc built on some of his insights. Subsequently it became more enlightening to discuss the nature of language -- in other words, how best the nature and workings of language could be described, rather than looking for ready made textbook definition(s) of language. From this approach which is basically known as typifying the discipline of Linguistics, it became clear that human language while being the most significant code of communication is also multifaceted and not amenable to any straight jacket description. Linguistics anchors the description of language basically on the following parameters

- Phonetics
- Phonology
- Syntax
- Semantics
- Applied Linguistics

Phonetics and Phonology

For Phonetics the speech sound or <u>phone</u> is central to the analysis. Any and every speech sound used for the production of speech constitutes a phone or the basic building block for speech. No speech is possible without the phone, and interestingly no phone is meaningful on its own unless in construction with other phones. Examples of more commonly occurring phones in speech across languages are (i) [p, t, k, f, v, s, z, h, 1, t, m, n) and (ii) [i, a, u, o, e, e] The phones in (i) are contoids while those in (ii) constitute the vocoids. We note the square brackets || which typically are used to enclose phones in linguistic analysis. It is also important to note that phones are not the same as letters of orthography, hence the usual difference in rendition or pronunciation. The phones are represented using phonetic symbols and constitute a phonetic/phonemic **transcription,** not letters of orthography or the spelling of language

Phonetics is the very first step in the analysis of speech and consequently HL as speech is basic in all human communication. Closely related to phonetics is phonology. In fact phonetics and phonology can be seen as two sides of a common coin as both are focused

on the nature and function of the speech sound. While phonetics is interested in all the speech sounds used for speech production in various languages, phonology is interested in only those speech sounds that can be used to make meaningful utterances in respective languages. Such speech sounds are called **Phonemes**. The phone is the building block for phonetics while the phoneme is for phonology.   Both phonetics and phonology use phonetic symbols in the representation of utterances   in   phonetic   transcription   and phonemic transcription respectively.   For the phonetic transcription all speech sounds, and modifications are represented. However, for the phonemic transcription only those speech sounds and modifications that arc used contrastively or distinctively are represented.

While phonetic transcription is enclosed in square brackets [p eij], phonemic transcription is enclosed within slanting strokes /pen/.   Note also the details of the phonetic transcription. This is due to the fact that the phonetic transcription captures and reflects all aspects of speech used in a given pronunciation.   On the contrary, phonemic transcription reflects only those aspects of speech used contrastively in the given language.

We would present the following passage both in the phonetic and phonemic transcriptions.

Passage

No one knows the way
Yet we all claim to know
the way of life
Only the Maker is and knows
Clara Ikekeonwu

English

Phonetic Transcription	Phonemic Transcription
nəʊ wʌn nəʊz ðə weɪ	nəʊ wʌn nəʊz ðə weɪ
jɛt wi ɔl kleɪm tʰə nəʊ	jɛt wi ɔl kleɪm tə nəʊ
ðə weɪ əv laɪf	ðə weɪ əv laɪf
əʊnlɪ ðə meɪkə ɪz ən nəʊz	əʊnlɪ ðə meɪkə ɪz ən
nəʊz	

Igbo

ò dí¹ɣ ¹¹óɲé ¹maà˅ra ụzǫ̀	ɔ́ dí ¹ɣɪ oɲe maara ʊzɔ̀
nãágbàɲē˅ɣì nà áɲị nĩ¹le	nágbàɲèɣì nà áɲị niile
kwèɹě nà àɲị mà	kwèɹě nà áɲị mà
úzǫ̀ ídʒě ụ̀wà	ʊzɔ̀ ídʒè ʊwà
ná¹áɲị óɲé¹kéɹé¹já bụị ja	ná¹anɪ óɲé kere ja bʊ
màkwà já	já mà kwà já

Yoruba

kòsí ɛnití ó mɔ̀nà	kòsí ɛnití ó mɔ̀nà
ʃùgbɔ̃ gbogbo wa la ròpé amɔ̃	ʃùgbɔ̀ gbogbo wa la ròpé a mɔ̃

ɔnà irīnàdʒò ājé

ɛniti ó dájé nikan ni, òūn losi
mɔ̀ ɔ́

The use of phonetic symbols in the representation of speech is to encode the inherent qualities of speech sounds and their modifications, not only as they occur in one language but wherever they may be found. This task, the letters of the orthography cannot perform. Letters of the orthography are not only a conventional construct of respective speech communities for the writing of their language/dialect but also often portray a lot of inconsistencies or discrepancies between spelling and pronunciation. A few examples from the English language would do here.

write   [raɪt]
right   [raɪt]
whright   [raɪt]

We note that three different orthographical representations 'wr' 'r' 'whr' stand for a single speech sound [r]. Similarly, the palatal nasal [ɲ] may have different orthographical

representations across languages. Hence we have the following:

Spanish
espana [espapa] 'Spanish'
Igbo
Anya [ana] eye(s)
We see that in Spanish the palatal nasal is represented as 'n' while in Igbo it is 'ny' yet the same pronunciation [p] in both.
Both phonetics and phonology have anchored various theories and analytical postures that have resulted in a robust growth especially in recent times. For phonetics the book, Principles of the International Phonetic Association has guided the various approaches to the identification, production, classification or description of speech sounds across languages. The International Phonetic Association is the author of the International Phonetic Alphabet which encodes the various phonetic symbols used in speech sound representation. Incidentally, both the Alphabet and the Association share a common acronym (IPA). The association which came into being in the later part of the 19th century

has had two major reviews, one in 1949, and the more 'recent' one in 1989. For such reviews input is drawn from linguists especially phoneticians and phonologists working in various languages across the world. This often accounts for the comprehensiveness of the data supplied and reflected.

In phonology various theories have emerged starting with classical phonology; also often called segmental phonology. We have witnessed linear and non-linear approaches to phonological analysis. Generative phonology as presented in Chomsky and Halle 1968 (often called SPE) represents the linear approach while Autosegmental phonology, metrical phonology and lexical phonology are good examples of the non-linear approach. Each of these approaches has been effectively applied to various natural languages. Greater insight into the tone languages of Africa and South East Asia has been gained, for instance, through Autosegmental phonology. In more recent researches generative phonology appears to have been relegated to the background. The Optimality Theory (OT) attests to this line of phonological investigation.

Syntax

The sound structure does not exist independent of other levels of linguistic analysis though it remains the first port of call in the investigation or analysis of HL. The speech sounds generally combine to make up lexical items or words.

p-e-n > pen

Igbo

o-k-e >6ke   rat

Yoruba

e-t-i > **eti**   ear

French

f-en-e-tr-e window

The words are mapped up into phrases or clauses or sentences.

English

John has a pen

Igbo

6ke. tara ami   'A rat ate the meat'

Yoruba

Eti meji la ni   'We have two ears'

These combinations have been examined from various perspectives - combinatory arrangements and their implications, the semantic implication etc. Some sentences are classified as simple, others complex and some others compound. Apart from this, one may ask, do sentences with identical structure have identical semantic implications,

especially when they have fairly identical lexical items? Consider the following adapted examples from Lyons 1977.

1. The book is John's.
2. John has a book.

Could these two mean the same? A closer look would show that the book in 2 may not necessarily be the one referred to in (1). Consider the following again.

3. There is a book on the table
4. There are lions in Africa

Would we consider 3 and 4 closely related? There is a fundamental difference between a generic, existential reference and a rather narrow 'locative' reference. While (3) is 'locative' (4) is existential.

The 'stringing together' of words for the formation of sentences, phrases etc is referred to in linguistics as syntax. The precursor of syntax is traditional grammar with which many of us are familiar. For instance we recall the basic sentence analysis of subject and predicate; the objects, complements etc.

Syntax has taken some of these fundamental elements to a higher, more insightful level, based on some constraints or shortcomings of the earlier grammatical approach. For instance

The subject - predicate approach would fail to x-ray, as it were, the inherent ambiguity in this commonly cited example.

"Flying planes can be dangerous"

The sentence could mean 'the planes flying' or 'the act of flying planes". In syntax the generative approach would through the specification of the underlying representation (UR) of the sentence as against the surface representation (SR) would reveal the inherent ambiguity. Apart from the Transformational Generative grammatical theory often called (TG) several other theories have appeared in the analysis of syntax. We have the Phrase Structure Grammar (PSG), which appears the closest to traditional grammar; Government and binding etc. Some of the generally discussed topics in syntax using these theories include constituency; hierarchical ordering of constituents, structural ambiguity, and transformations.

Syntax like the other components of linguistics goes beyond individual languages to the establishment of general trends across languages. The language typology of sentence structure is among the most basic of such approaches in syntax. Among the basic sentence structure - types across languages are the

SVO   -   Subject-verb-object
SOV   -   Subject-object-verb
VSO   -   Verb-subject-object

SVO languages are the direct opposite of the SOV in terms of various properties of grammar. For instance prepositions are preferred to postpositions, conjunctions are

attached   to succeeding conjuncts; modifiers follow the nouns they modify. Some examples would suffice here.

English

John killed the goat

S   V   O Igbo Obi gburu ewu   'Obi killed the goat'

S   V   O

Yoruba

Ade   pa ewure   Ade killed a goat S   V   O

However, in the realization of adjectival constructions, Igbo and a number of other African languages may be considered as inconsistent SVO languages as they consistently post pose their adjectives. Hence we have

Igbo

ewu ojii   'black goat'

nwoke ocha   'fair complexioned man'

Yoruba

ewure dudu   'black goat[1]

pkunrin pupa   'a fair complexioned man'

This is of course different from what obtains in English 'black pen' 'red shoes'. It is clear, therefore from the foregoing that there may well be general tendencies, in typologies, there are however no straitjacket solutions to the issue. The various theories noted earlier grant further insight into this complex tapestry of grammatical affiliations.

Morphology

Closely related to syntax in its operation is a rather smaller area, more or less an adjunct of syntax.   There is morphology which specializes in the preparation, for syntax, its basic tool of operation - words or lexical items.   The general operational concept in morphology is the morpheme. This, of course, can be sub-categorized or broken down into morphs.   Morphemes may be 'free' or 'bound'.   Words, morphemic constructions that can stand on their own and convey a meaning are said to be free morphemes while those that cannot are designated bound morphemes. Consequently, in the English word 'untrue' true is a free morpheme while un - is a bound morpheme.   It is noteworthy that while 'un' inherently has no meaning on its own, when attached to lexical items a meaning emerges thus •

untrue   not true

unequal   not equal

unholy   not holy

The phonological component impacts on morphology as well. consideration of the following will convince us of the validity of this assertion.

illegal   not legal

irregular   not regular

improper   not proper

The change in the rendition of the prefix is supplied by phonological rules.

By this we sec that while morphology has a close association with syntax, phonology is actively involved in morphological process. Morphophonology is an area of Linguistics that captures and discusses the interface of morphology and phonology.

Semantics

Semantics is all about meaning in language especially natural languages. No matter how well structured a sentence is, meaning is the only factor that ensures its relevance in communication. Chomsky 1965, virtual parody of the Structuralists near obsession with sentence structure makes our point clear. In the work Chomsky gives an example:

'Colourless green ideas sleep furiously'

Structure wise the utterance is flawless. It can be broken down into NP + VP. The NP 'colourless green idea', while the VP is made up of 'sleep furiously'. But the whole utterance is all sound, structure and no sense. It is meaningless, with no ultimate semantic component. Hence semantics deals with various shades of meanings in language. Meanings could be denotative or connotative. Denotative meanings reflect the 'direct' meaning of a given utterance while the connotative or 'hidden' or 'indirect' may not be seen to emanate from the utterance's components.

'John kicked the bucket'

From a denotative sense a male individual called John using his foot struck a metal or plastic container, bucket. From a connotative, opaque dimension 'John died'. Hence idioms, proverbs collocations constitute issues of interest in semantics.

Applied Linguistics

The various aspects or components of Linguistics so far discussed viz phonetics, phonology, syntax, morphology and semantics constitute the core of Linguistics.   They are often classified as theoretical Linguistics. The application of the findings of theoretical Linguistics yields the other aspect of Linguistics known as Applied Linguistics.   More often in these parts Applied Linguistics is rather narrowed down to the application of linguistic principles to teaching.   While the aptness of the application of linguistic framework to pedagogy cannot be doubted, the application has a wider scope. Sociolinguistics discusses the interface of language and society; psycholinguistics is concerned with detailing the interface of language and the mind - all these through the use of linguistic theories.   For instance **Sociolinguistics** often is preoccupied with the social and other indices that determine how people use their language. Indices such as age, sex, social status - all have significant influence on our speech.

From the foregoing it is clear that a lot about language is now known, through modern linguistic research. But has Nigeria actually benefitted from this, in spite of her multilingual setting? In the early twentieth century in Nigeria, the issue of linguistic research especially as concerns local languages was almost non-existent. This may well be a factor of our colonial experience. English was the only language most people felt needed to be studied and spoken effectively to secure a good education, a good job and to be accepted in a society governed by the English. The rather robust multiciplicity of Nigerian languages and their dialects was seen as a setback and some expatriate scholars bemoaned this. Ward 1936 bared her mind when she explained the difficulty of selecting

a standard variety of Igbo. Multiplicity of Igbo dialects and the absence of a common or central ruler constituted a great barrier to this unifying force or project.

Indigenous Languages' Teaching/Learning

We note here that part of the problem at that point of the Nigerian national developments with regards to linguistic research was largely non-awareness of the wide range of possibilities open to linguists, properly motivated in the study of languages. It took linguists like Bamgbose to draw attention to these possibilities and declare multilingualism a way of life of some speech communities and not a calamity or

disaster. All that was needed was proper management of these linguistic resources. With the efforts of linguists and favourably disposed politicians and government policy makers, the issues of learning and teaching of Nigerian languages got the much needed attention they deserved. That, of course, was the preliminary stage. The National Policy on Education, (NPE) had a language component, advocating the teaching and learning of three major Nigerian languages, Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. Pupils were also expected to be taught in their mother tongue/the language of their immediate environment. The latter, we believe, is to ensure that other local languages are not left to extinction. However, after over two decades of the existence of the (NPE) has indigenous languages' teaching and research in Nigeria fared any better? To most linguists and interested onlookers, the language component of the NPE has been a huge paper tiger. No doubt some success has been recorded. Certainly, it could be better, indeed a lot better.

Although, the three major languages are taught in schools - primary, secondary and tertiary; there are problems. These range from outright apathy on the part of native speakers to Government's partial or lukewarm commitment to the promotion of indigenous languages in the country. A good example of both is the policy on the use of the mother-tongue or the language of the immediate environment, for pupils in Nursery and primary school. We know that such schools often prefer to use English as medium of instruction. Some even introduce other European languages at the expense of the local languages. In Ikekeonwu (1986a) it was shown that many university Nursery and primary schools as well as our 'high brow' schools arc culprits.

In the secondary schools the trend is not much different except, of course, in the Unity schools where the three major Nigerian languages are taught to usually a handful of students who opt to study them. The reluctance to teach the indigenous languages has to do with the apathy on the part of the teachers, students and parents.

This situation needs an active intervention by the Federal Government, State governments as well as well meaning, patriotic Nigerians. Universities and the Institute for Nigerian languages could be called upon to proffer solutions to the ugly situation that threatens quite a significant number of languages with total extinction.

Families must be alive to their responsibility of rearing children that are not aliens to their roots and pathetic parroters of alien languages and cultures. By this posture, it is not being advocated that our children be exposed only to our local/indigenous languages. Given both our antecedent as an ex-colony, and the all pervading globalization, that would be playing the ostrich. What we need do as suggested in Ikekeonwu and Nwadike 2004 is to get our younger ones bilingual or multilingual as the case may be early in life. This is linguistically possible, since the younger the child the more readily amenable to language acquisition/learning.

Some may, however, be skeptical about the whole issue of promoting multilingualism in a country that some claim is already suffused or awash with languages. Various estimates have been presented on the number of languages in Nigeria. These range from 250 to well over 400 (see Ikekeonwu 2007). The current population of Nigeria (see the 2006 census) is put at about 140 million[7]. This means a population of 140 million speaks between 250 and 400 languages. The impact of this multiplicity of languages palls into insignificance when compared with the linguistic situation in Papua New Guinea where only about three million (3 million) people share 800 languages! (see Edward Finegan, David Blair, Peter Collins (2000).

What we need is an effective management of our languages through the enunciation and strict implementation of well-thought out language policies. There is also the need to motivate all those interested in Linguistics and Nigerian languages.
Various communities can do a lot to promote their indigenous languages. They can sponsor their sons and daughters to study Linguistics and their language. Everything should not be left for the Federal and state governments. they should encourage publications in their languages and **use** the language(s) in their public gatherings, television, radio etc. This would go a long way to preventing language loss/extinction. The loss of a language is the loss of a people, their identity and cultural heritage. Even if these people are alive and healthy they are psychologically empty and enslaved by the language and culture that have supplanted theirs. I believe we are beginning to see how important, our languages are. State assemblies that rattle off all their deliberations in languages other than theirs would probably now see what great disservice they are doing to the development and propagation of their language.

2.   Gender
For many, especially those in language studies, in the past the word gender would immediately be located within the threshold of grammar. Some languages classify their lexical items along gender lines hence some words are masculine, while others are feminine and yet another group neuter. Languages like Latin and French readily come to mind in this respect.

Our consideration of gender here is not in this manner but in respect of the contemporary understanding of gender as referring to all about the woman from her cradle to the grave.

It is in this sense that the United Nations encapsulates her Millennium Development goal (MDG) number 3. We would take a look at the girl-child, the woman in her prime and finally the woman in her old age. These various facets of the Human female (HF) as she frets and struts on life's stage would be examined from the Nigerian perspective. This invariably would showcase some experiences of many an African/Asian woman.

The Girl Child
In many African countries the girl-child is born into a strictly regimented, socially delimited arrangement. She is seen as tender; she is loved; she however is born with roles engraved as it were, on her soul and palms the roles of care giving and procreation. It is the duty of her parents and all and sundry - neighbours, strangers, passersby and all, to help her get well prepared for the execution of these roles. Starting from the naming day, these roles and qualities earlier pointed out are specified. In Ikekeonwu 2002,1 did indicate this 'mixed-bag' naming phenomenon. The names are categorized into Gender Prone Names (GPN). GPN subsumes names that indicate the following:

- The girl as an object of beauty and feminity
- The girl as a chattel lamentation/disappointment it's a girl (lamentation labels)
the girl as prospective mother and supreme caregiver market day names
In that paper many Igbo girls' names were used as relevant examples.

1. Mma   'Beauty'
2. Ulumma   'Beautiful second daughter'
3. Nwanyimma   'Beautiful girl'
4. Adamma   'Beautiful first daughter'
5. Akunna   'Father's wealth'
6. Egonna   'Father's money'
7. Ogbenyealu   'Not to be married by the poor'
8. Egobekee   To be used to fetch the white man's money'
9. Ndidi   'Patience'
10. Nwanyibuife   'A girl is also something'
11. Nwanyimeole   'What can a girl do?
12. Nneamaka   'Mother is good'
13. Nneoma   'Good mother'
14. Nneka   'Mother is supreme'
15. Mgbeke
16. Mgboye
I7. Mgbafor
I8. Mgbokwo

Names 1-4 exalt the beauty and inherent feminity of the girl. The beauty names emphasize facial or surface values. Names 5-8 emphasize the traditional 'chattel' value of

the woman in the culture. She is to be sold off, as it were to make money for the father/family. Names 9-11 are the lamentation labels often to comfort a family that has had successive births of girls. The undertone is that she is not welcome but what do we do but to manage or tolerate her. Names 15-18 depict the market days on which the girl is born. One would wonder why that should be of any significance here. Aren't boys also so named, that is based on the day of birth. However a close linguistic scrutiny of the morphology of such names reveals unsettling connotative references or innuendoes? For the male child it is

19. Nwa + eke —> Nweke 'the child of Eke' .'
20. Oke + eke —> Okeke 'the portion of Eke'
For the girl it is
21.   Mgbe + eke —» Mgbeke 'time of Eke/on eke day'
22.   Mgbe + oye —> Mgboye   "   " Oye/on oye day'

The undertone of the assertiveness in the male names 19-20 is clear while the diffidence of the female names 21-22 is also .ipparent. A happening on a day - the birth of a girl-child -rannot be compared with the assertion of ownership of the day the child of Eke/a portion of Eke.

The semantic implications, therefore, show the extent of language engineering and the anthropocentric values involved.-

There are petting names for the girl-child in Yoruba.
Abike   "born to be petted"
Folake   "petted with wealth"
Morenike,   "I have someone to pet"
we have dwelt on these names because of their overt or covert effect on the bearers of the names.   We note that for of care-giving and procreation would not bother if the girl drops out to marry. Some of the younger drop-outs could be forced into marriage, sometimes with dire consequences for the girls. The many cases of Vesico Vaginal Fistula (VVF) are eloquent testimonies to this terrible malaise in our society. Further, poverty stricken background of the girl exposes her to the whims of some wealthy, morally bankrupt men. So teenage pregnancy or even HIV/AIDS comes knocking. Poorly supervised co-educational schools springing up in every nook and cranny of our urban centres, especially, compound the problem of immorality and increase adolescent girl casualties.

A recent billboard that appears to adorn every major street in Kampala, Uganda shows a full grown, apparently married man pot-belly, receding hair, thick palms and all-standing suggestively close to a teenage girl and there is the inscription "Would you like your friend to be found with your daughter? Why are you with his?" In Nigeria the scenario, in this respect is not much different, if different at all.

The adolescent or young woman getting into the university in recent times is also faced with problems of distraction and economic crunch. Some who find the pressure overwhelming may even readily succumb to the enticing campaign of traffickers promising greener pastures abroad after an easy passage. They take the plunge and never really recover as they are prostituted across various European towns/cities. No thanks to what may be described as negative globalization.

It is no longer news in our Ivory Towers that some lecturers and administrative staff take turns at sexually harassing their students. The Igbo adage that states "A dog does not chew the bone hung on its neck" is of course not wholesome to these interesting characters who not only chew the bone on their neck but snarl at or even bite anyone that dares to come near or comment on this despicable act turning character molders to character marauders!

In the earlier days of the woman's foray into university education in Nigeria, that is in the 1950s and sixties when there were only a few women in the universities, this trend could hardly be imagined let alone actualized. This, probably, was due to the age and maturity of these women, most of who were derisively referred to as 'acada'. It is also possible that the morality threshold of the male lecturers and administrators of the time was reasonably high. We do not however advocate the setting back of the clock, making the women go through various circuitous academic programmes before getting to the university at a much older age, at many of these women would have gone through primary school, teacher training colleges, higher school etc. before eventually arriving at the university fully mature. The MDG(specifically 2 and 3) which advocate equal educational opportunities for boys and girls would not support this[8].

We advocate firm disciplinary action against any lecturer/administrative staff found wanting in this regard, that is in the sexual harassment of any female student. Alongside social matters, we must also consider the content of the disciplines/courses female undergraduates embark on. This of course is invariably an offshoot of the subjects they handled or learnt in the secondary school. Williams 1987 remarks on the issue of dichotomy in disciplines male and female students take to:

...in addition to other factors which are contributory to the rate of female participation in STM education female students tend to take the least line of resistance by going into disciplines designated as feminine such as liberal arts, education etc and shy away from courses in STM designated masculine.

There has been some improvement in this observation, as some women have- gone into and prospered in Science, Technology and Mathematics. It is no longer a strange event in Nigeria to see women graduating from the Engineering faculty or the medical school. There is, however, still so much gap to be covered.

On graduation two main challenges face the young woman - labour market and marriage. The one-year National Youth Service which is compulsory for all Nigerian graduates below the age of thirty (30) plays a role here in that some of the female graduates meet their husband during the service. The latter promotes inter-ethnic marriages since corpers generally serve in states other than theirs. With the issues of marriage and employment sorted out the female graduate feels partially fulfilled. Her fulfillment comes after the arrival of the baby(ies). This is not restricted, however, to the female graduate, even her sisters who had dropped out of school or who never went to school have the same burden. A childless marriage in many African cultures results in either separation or divorce. The birth of all girls has an identical result. In both cases the woman is often held responsible, sometimes in defiance of contrary medical report. The unfortunate ones die during the holocaust of violence, and I lustration unleashed on them both by their spouses and his **relations.**

To contain issues of violence against women, the UN has instituted the convention for the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Over eighty countries have ratified CEDAW but only a negligible few have actually domesticated it. Nigeria, unfortunately, is yet lo domesticate CEDAW.

Perhaps, among the most outrageous acts of violence against women in Nigeria, and indeed many African countries are the barbaric and cruel widowhood practices. Cases abound of these very dehumanizing practices. The story of one Mrs. Patience Nwose from one of the southern states in Nigeria is a case in point. She recently relayed her experience during the Synagogue Church of All Nations (SCOAN) Widows' Forum in Lagos in Nigeria.

A mother of four, her husband died in an automobile accident as he was returning home from work in the ever busy Lagos traffic. She was taken home with her children for the burial and after the burial, her head cropped and donning on a black dress she was taken to a bush. There her clothes were removed and she stayed for about three weeks all alone getting little or no food for the period. She was to go through the ordeal to show she was not guilty of the husband's death. If she was, it is assumed she would not survive. Patience

survived but came back very ill.

'

Some widows are made to many the late husband's brother or relation. Refusal always constitutes a good ground for the total abandonment of the widow and the children. Some others are completely dispossessed of all the property and sent into the cold with the children. Most of the studies from which our conclusions have been drawn are focused on the South Eastern part of Nigeria among the Igbo.

These practices affect both the uneducated and educated women. In some cases though the educated women refuse to succumb to the threats of their in-laws as they (the women) were salary earners and were able to cater for their children to some extent. Some have sought for help and protection from various religious organizations.

Women in Public Life

We now turn attention to the woman in public life in Nigeria. On this score the results are not heartwarming. The rural woman is generally relegated to the background in virtually everything. Generally, she is uneducated, a subsistence farmer or a petty trader and often a mother of many children. Luckily, some Non-Governmental organizations have taken a keen interest in their plight in recent times. The Nigerian Association of University Women (NAUW) the affiliate of the International Federation of University Women (IFUW) in Nigeria has for the past four (4) years or so concentrated one of her projects (partly sponsored by the international body, Bina Roy Partners in Development (BRPID)) on rural communities in the country, trying to empower rural women both through adult education/literacy classes and skill acquisition arrangements.

The educated urban dwelling women while they may Make their mark in their various disciplines are often discriminated against in terms of appointments. The educational and political platforms provide support for this assertion. Iliya (1999) comments on women's appointments
in the teaching industry as it were.

> In Nigeria a substantial proportion of teachers particularly at the lower levels of education are women. There are more women teaching in the Nursery, primary and Secondary schools than we have in the tertiary institutions but very few women ever become headmistress and principals...

Iliya's 1999 assertion is still largely true of the situation ten years on. At the tertiary level the story is not cheering. There is a glaring gender disparity in number and ranks of the academic staff. There are certainly more male Professors, Deans, Directors and Chairpersons of vital university committees. To date the highly elevated post of the Vice Chancellor has been held by only three (3) women in a country that has over sixty (60) universities - (Federal and State). Since there is the common adage, charity begins at home we may look at the situation at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN).

The University has never had a woman as the Vice Chancellor, UNN may not be alone in this regard as none of the older universities has had a female Vice Chancellor

as well. UNN indeed only produced her first female Deputy Vice Chancellor recently during the administration of Prof. Chinedu Nebo. This is really commendable for the administration and we hope will blaze a new trail in elections/appointments of women to elevated policy making positions in the institution. We also note that Professor Chinedu Nebo's administration has produced the highest number of female Deans in the history of the University.

It could however be argued that only a handful of women, given the constraints already stated, get to teach in the university. Those who get there in many cases are not readily promoted into higher lectureship cadre/rank that would qualify them to vie for these positions. While it is indeed very necessary for more women to get into academics and prove their mettle through effective research and worthy publications, the constraint against them, even if they so wish, should not be underrated. The younger woman has to combine raising a family and serious academic work. In many developing countries, Nigeria inclusive, cybercafe's are the rather few, and on university campuses, they are heavily patronized such that many academics have to jostle for spaces in (hem with their students. The female academics especially the younger ones can hardly get access to the internet, for instance, since the school-run period takes its toll on the break lime that might have been used to visit the cybercafe. We are, however, happy to observe that Prof. Nebo's administration has tackled rather vigorously the access to internet problem for the academics. Facilities are provided to enable staff take advantage of them and readily gain access to the internet. We are however not advocating a quota system m the university with regards to women academics as this could be abused either overtly or covertly. We however insist that any academic - female or male - who qualifies to be I promoted or appointed to policy making position should be so [1] elevated without any form of discrimination.

In the political arena in Nigeria the women have not fared better. A brief consideration of the gender statistics of our various arms of the government shows this. Nigeria has never, to the best of our knowledge, had neither a female Head of State nor a female governor of a State. The House of Assembly in any of the Republics has never had up to ten percent (10%) of its membership as female at any time in Nigerian history. The current assembly is no exception.

However, it must be noted that the Obasanjo-led administration has so far in Nigerian history been the most gender sensitive and appreciative. His administration gave Nigeria the first female Minister of Finance after over forty years of Nigeria's corporate existence. Bravo! The difference in this and other choices of women in strategic policy making positions is always clear. The current Umaru Musa Yar'Adua's administration has continued this trend and we hope it would gather momentum in due course.

Having attempted, howbeit briefly an outline of the female child's life - from early childhood through the teens, through adulthood, it may be necessary to comment on her old age as well, since this issue has become an important global one especially among various NGOs. In many countries especially the developing ones women get neglected in old age. In the developed countries where there arc policies for taking care of the aged the problem is not as severe. The aged get into Old Peoples' Homes in many cases. Since the gradual disintegration of the extended family system in Nigeria, the aged especially the aged female has been consistently neglected. Many if not all their children leave for the cities and only visit once a year -- during Christmas. While some money or gifts may be sent to them sporadically by these children, they are very lonely and weak and getting to the local market may sometimes become extremely difficult. Consequently, hunger becomes a serious problem to grapple with. Shresta 2002 lists some of the problems of the elderly in Nepal as follows: loneliness, limited income and social obligations, alienation, fear and regret. These are very similar to the experiences of the elderly especially women in Nigeria.

Many of the problems we have noted in our gender survey above emanate from the wrongful perception of the nature and role of the female in our society. Women are generally relegated to the background and perceived as weak physically, mentally and emotionally. But this is a dangerous, largely unfounded theory. However, the wrong perception of the girl/woman in our society has taken a serious toll on their personality, career and general wellbeing. A change in this unfortunate perception is not impossible if all concerned will maintain an open mind. The way most African cultures laud motherhood leaves a bright hope for this,"

When this is achieved our society would definitely experience a great positive turn-around, right from the family. A proper perception of the potential of the women would almost automatically get them into the policy making arena where they need to be, at various strata of the society and a better, happier society would emerge. Lets consider the submission below in the Unicef publication earlier noted.

The consequences of women's exclusion from household decisions can be as dire for children as they are for women themselves. In families in which women are decision-makers, the proportion of resources devoted to children is far greater than in those in which women have a less decisive role. This is because women generally place a higher premium than men on welfare -related goals and are more likely to use their influence and there sources they control to promote the needs of children in particular and of the family in general.

Conclusion

Language and gender as we have seen in my brief survey constitute veritable areas of investigation, dedicated research and societal appreciation.

A multilingual setting as ours in Nigeria calls for a better understanding of the nuances of language and language engineering best practices that would turn these languages into assets rather than liabilities. Linguists must be involved in issues of language appreciation and re-positioning language policies should be dutifully implemented. This is facilitated when such policies are unambiguous in their couching. Indigenous language development should not be left for the Federal Government alone. State governments, speech communities, the religious organizations all have significant roles to play. Some communities have their language on the brink of extinction while waiting for the Federal government to come and develop their orthography, document their sentence structure, showcase the role of language in their society/culture etc. They might as well be waiting for Godot.

Various communities gather during festivals and discuss development projects such as building town halls, providing pipe-borne water, electricity etc but never to talk about the fate of their language in a highly multilingual, competitive and dynamic nation where only the fittest survive. With all these trappings of modernization without a vibrant living language, the centre cannot hold, and it is only a question of time before a full manifestation of the loss of their collective psyche, common voice and identity.

The global awareness of the potential of • the girl/woman has in recent times led to significant shifts in policy making at indeed very high/elevated levels. The UN has blazed the trail in this regard; appointing women into significant positions. We note the positions of Dr. Oby Ezekwesili and Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iwela in the UN monetary institutions. A Tanzanian lady is next in rank to Ban Kimoon the UN Secretary General. All this is heartwarming and promises a great future for the woman in particular and for humanity in general. We hope that future would arrive soon; and be sustained.

Chairman Sir, this inaugural lecture would, to me appear inconclusive without a mention, no matter how brief, of those whom God used in various capacities, to actualize the event of today.

My dear parents Hon. Chief and Loolo Josiah Iwuala started it all. I fondly dedicated my doctoral thesis to them with the words "To my parents, Chief and Mrs J.U. Iwuala who saw the gem in giving a woman a formal education". I thank God for blessing me with such wonderful parents. By His grace, they saw me through before ascending to greater glory.

I wish to acknowledge with gratitude the intellectual seed sown in me by all my teachers from primary to the tertiary level. At the tertiary level I was privileged to have been moulded by such accomplished scholars as Prof. M.J.C. Echemo, Prof. D.I. Nwoga (late) Prof. Romanus Egudu, Prof. (Mrs) Juliet Okonkwo; Prof. Helen Chukwuma

(then Helen Peters), Prof. Emmanuel Obiechina - all at the time lecturers at the Department of English of this great institution.

For my Masters and Ph.D I was again in the hands of international scholars of repute, Prof. Allan Cruttenden and Prof. Robert G. Armstrong (late) respectively. To all of them I say a big thank you. I must also mention with gratitude the influence on my academic work, of that revered colossus of phonetics, late Prof. Peter Ladefoged. His encouragement led Io I lie publication of some of my better known international contributions to phonetics.

I thank my Swedish colleagues and friends at the Department of Linguistics and Phonetics, Lund University, Sweden. My sabbatical leave there proved to be very productive, due to the co-operation and conducive social environment I enjoyed. I thank specially Prof. Gosta Bruce, i he Head of Department then.

It has also been very interesting working in the Department of Linguistics and Nigerian Languages of this University. I thank God for the experience.

I appreciate my friends at the International Federation of University Women (IFUW), Louise Croot (current President) Dorothy Meyer, Jenny Strauss, Elizabeth Poskit, Reiko Aoki, Shirley Randell Leigh Bradford Ratteree, Susan philips, Alice Kagoda, Clara Osinulu and many more. My interaction with these seasoned academics, administrators, and voice for the voiceless women has really positively impacted on me in my assessment of women empowerment issues and global gender equations/politics.

May I also acknowledge the contribution to my academic odyssey of my many MA and Ph.D supervisees. I NOTE particularly my ex-doctoral supervisees - Drs Ijeoma Okorji, Frances Chukwukere; Cecilia Eme; Joy Uguru, Gideon Omachonu and Evelyn Mbah. These have all through their various academic achievements both nationally and internationally, continued to prove their mettle and make me proud. Bravo, I say to them!

I would like to appreciate my children. They have been a significant source of comfort and courage in my life. May God bless them the more.

I remember with warm regards my friends at the SCOAN, especially our great mentor and quintessential servant of God, Prophet T.B. Joshua OFR.

Finally, I thank in a very special way Prof. Chinedu Ositadimma Nebo our Vice Chancellor for effectively redefining and galvanizing inaugural lectures at the University of Nigeria. At the inception of his administration there were only a few inaugural

lectures to the credit of an institution that came into existence over four decades earlier. Today we have well over twenty more. We will not forget this great achievement and commitment to academic excellence of your administration. The efforts of the dedicated scholars that constitute the Senate Ceremonials Committee under the able leadership of Prof. Obi Njoku, are highly commended and appreciated for the achievement of this feat. Thank you.

In conclusion I thank all that found time to attend this lecture. Thank you and God bless.

NOTES

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De Saussure, a French linguist is generally considered the father of modern linguistics. Any speech sound used distinctively in speech of a linguistic community constitutes a phoneme.

The idiolect is the totality of an individual's speech mannerisms or idiosyncrasies.

A minimal pair is a pair of words that are similar in all respects but differ in one sound segment. This difference results in a difference in the meaning of the words.

pan /paen/   -'a metal container often with a handle' ban /baen/   -'embargo'
pan and ban constitute a minimal pair in the English language.

Cognates are a pair or set of words that depict systematic sound correspondences and semantic

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