

Men Do Cry Too: Gendering Interpersonal Meaning in Nigerian Online Blogs

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Abstract

Human interaction is overtly influenced by gender; this is inadvertently dependent on the society as well as the culture of the people involved. Africa is known for its patriarchal bias of ‘men don’t cry’, which is fast becoming a hegemony in African societies, especially in Nigeria. This study investigates the gendered differences in interpersonal meanings online, this is in a bid to refute/uphold the patriarchal bias of inexpressiveness of emotion in Nigeria. The study, therefore brings to the fore, the type of interpersonal meanings displayed by men on virtual platforms; it expatiates the discursive strategies used to express interpersonal meanings by both genders; it discusses the dominant types of interpersonal meaning used on these platforms by the two genders. A comparative analysis is then done to explain the gendered differences that exists in the selected online forums. Thirty posts are purposively selected from two online forums-Mamallete and Stella Dimoko Kokus blog. Fifteen posts each by both male and female were analysed using Eggins’ Tannen’s (1990) difference theory. The study reflects men’s crave for intimacy, support and the need to be understood, despite their show of ‘manliness’ and ‘strength’. The data portray men as those who display emotions more in virtual communication than in real real-life. The study concludes that online forums create an enabling environment for the expression of interpersonal meanings by the male gender.

Introduction

Human discourse is explicitly and implicitly entrenched in gender and gendered relations. A lot of scholars (such as Holmes, 2006 and Wodak 2001) have agreed that gender is present in our everyday interaction. These relations include several patriarchal bias and gender stereotypes such as inexpressiveness of emotions by men in Africa. Manhood in Africa has mostly been attached with strength and vigour, both emotionally and physically. Most men are therefore raised from birth with this notion that ‘men don’t cry’. This inadvertently manifests in the way they form and maintain relations with others.

The interpersonal components of language allow users to choose modes through which they can form relations with others. Relationships are not only built in face-to-face interactions, but also in computer-mediated communication. Online forums are one of the best platforms where interaction is enabled, stories are posted and comments are made by readers. Most online forums have posts on varying themes; one of the topics that attract comments most is gender issues. Most of these posts are authentic and real-life stories; posters however make use of different interpersonal components of language to present their stories, thereby engaging the commenters.

The Internet is an ingenious resource that allows for free expression of opinions and viewpoints. These expressions are produced in a free atmosphere, usually with little or no censure; identities

are also preserved on most online platforms. Online forums are, therefore, a good platform for deducing interpersonal features as well as the stance-taking features of discourse in a naturally-occurring environment. Many online forums have become household names, when it comes to dissemination of information, *Nairaland*, *Instablog9ja* and *Pulse9ja* are examples of such platforms. Most young folks visit different online platforms to obtain information to enable them keep abreast of happenings within and outside the country. These forums are mainly online, which could be accessed with mobile phones and other internet-connected devices. This makes it easy for most youths to follow at least two or more of these platforms. Since language-use is the major means by which these platforms are sustained, it is therefore important to note and analyse how meaning is deduced in language. This is done by looking at the grammar and meaning of the discourse. (Keiko, 2012, p.93).

For many scholars, the interpersonal meaning is achieved through the mood and modality patterns of grammar (Eggs, 1994). According to Eggs (1994), the mood structure of a clause deals with how the functional constituents of a clause is organized to derive meaning. Each mood types, in realization, corresponds to each of the functions they serve. Because of this, Eggs (2004) summarises the different mood-types in line with their corresponding speech functions.

Patpong (2009) opined that interpersonal metafunction of language deals with the interactional processes enacted between speakers/writers and their listeners. It involves the resources of grammar that are used to establish roles in a social interaction and speech roles in dialogic communications: this includes resources for establishing, changing, and maintaining interpersonal relations with others. According to Halliday & Matthiessen (2004, p.61), the interpersonal meaning is a “clause as exchange” that enacts social roles and relations. On his part, Matthiessen (1995, p.17, cited in Patpong, 2009, p.210) views the interpersonal meaning as a resource for enacting social roles and relationships between speaker/writer and listener/reader. From all those definitions, two assumptions arise:

- i. Analysing texts using the interpersonal metafunction elements involves a situation of “dialogic passages” (Eggs & Slade, 1997, cited in Patpong, 2009, p.198)
- ii. The interpersonal meaning is related to the social roles interactants are playing once engaged in a dialogue.

The Internet has been described as a global computing network that makes it possible for people to communicate with one another over great distances very cheaply and quickly. Internet communication is generally divided into two categories: the public and private communication. Private communications are not meant for the ‘public’, and they are mostly emails. Private communications it could also be messages between users of specific online sites or message boards. Public communications are made through Usenet, Internet forums, multi-user games, or other types of chat rooms. In public communication, the communication allows for anonymity in the process of interaction between users where they make use of pseudonyms and avatars as means of identifying the participants (Herring, 2007).

The Internet has brought social interaction into the electronic domain, thereby making it possible for participants to construct, express and share their views in various online interactive forums. It also affords participants the opportunity to develop social bonding and relationship as they build online communities (Taiwo, 2010, p.1).

Taiwo (2010) posits that digital awareness cropped up gradually in Nigeria on the heels of the emergence of the establishment of “Naijanet”, the first Nigerian online network forum “dedicated to news from Nigeria and discussions about social and political issues facing Nigerians at home and abroad.” The autocratic nature of the military era in the 1990s also fast-tracked the spread of internet usage as activists deployed the Internet medium as “anti-military venom” to criticise their governments through channels like newsgroups, UseNet and social websites (Taiwo, 2010, p.183). He also lists some internet forums organised by Nigerians to air and discuss solely Nigerian issues; some of which are:

- *Nairaland* (<http://www.nairaland.com/>)
- *Nigerian Village Square* (<http://www.nigeriavillagesquare.com/>)
- *Motherland Nigeria* (<http://www.motherlandnigeria.com/>)
- *Sahara Reporters* (<http://www.saharareporters.com>)” (Taiwo, 2010, p. 183).

According to Turkle (1999, p.30), the absence of a real name/identity on online forums, fosters discussions on what could normally be seen as taboo subjects. One of such areas where ‘taboo subjects’ are pronounced (in Nigeria especially) is the issue of sex and gender-related issues. *Mamallette* is a group on Facebook where females who call themselves ‘mama’ post varying stories on issues affecting women and the female gender in general. These include issues on sex, in-laws, finance, house-keeping, amidst others. The group has at least 30,000 subscribers with a group of administrators called ‘admin’. Stella Dimoko is a Nigerian blogger whose blog has at least 10,000 followers and subscribers. It is a personal blog with different sections that deals with varying issues. One of the sections is ‘Stand Alone Narratives’ section where anonymous posts are allowed. This is one of the sections that attract posts the most, especially by men.

From birth, one gender or the other is categorised from the genital organs, and from then, gender is enacted following specific models of how we are expected to behave. The issue of gender is not simply about being male or female, according to Wodak (1981, p. 270), we exhibit gender via gendered activities, including everything we say and the modes through which we have been trained to interact with others. It entails characterising, distinguishing and defining males and females by socially and culturally defined attributes, expectations, opportunities, privileges, and duties. The knowledge of these gender roles and conforming to them are acquired through gender socialisation, which starts from birth.

Differences in the expression of emotions by the two genders have been the focus of many research activities over the years. Several studies (such as Holmes, 2006; Wood, 2009) have

analysed the different levels of emotional expressiveness of the two genders and have concluded that the two genders have some stereotypes that are accepted in the society as modes of expressing emotions by the two genders (Wang & Shelley, 2018). Most of the conclusions drawn on the level of emotional expressivity have mostly been done using data from real life conversations that involves a physical appearance. The society, however, is not stagnant, it is constantly advancing technologically. This is because the new media is one of the most popular methods of communication in recent times. According to Trevino, Webster & Stein (2000), there is the belief by many, that the technological advancements of online communication and relations, will break the stereotype that women express more emotions than men. This is due to the anonymity that comes with virtual communication. It is from this position that the current study sets out to investigate the types of interpersonal meaning expressed in the selected online forums and the gender differences in the kinds of interpersonal meaning displayed on these forums.

Literature Review

Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) views language as a social-semiotic system, i.e., a meaning-making process which includes experiential, interpersonal and textual meanings. According to Simpson (2004), the interpersonal meaning is about how we orientate, shape and measure our utterances as discourse. Bloor & Bloor (2004, p.11) emphasise this assertion as follows: “language is used to enable us to participate in communicative acts with other people, to take on roles and to express and understand feelings, attitudes”. This is why Halliday and Matthiessen (2014, p.135) contend that an ‘act’ of speaking is something that might more appropriately be called an *inter-act*: it is an exchange in which giving implies receiving and demanding implies giving in response.

The mood structure of a clause refers to how the functional constituents of language are organised to achieve different meanings; this includes the functional elements of the clause. The typical mood of clauses (declarative, interrogative, imperative) are however not the only possibilities of realising mood. For example, while commands are often represented in imperative clauses, declaratives can be functionally aligned to realise the same semantic implication of a command. According to Eggins (2004, p.147), the following are some of the questions to be asked when typical and untypical choices of mood structures are made: are there marked choices in the clause structures? Who made these choices and for what purpose? What semantic implication does the choice of using declaratives in the place of imperatives for commands have? The choice of this marked and unmarked structures is sometimes determined by the context of language use, the register of the ongoing discourse and the kind of relationships that exists between the participants of the conversation.

The interpersonal meaning is realised in structure via the mood and modality and is majorly determined by the tenor of proposition (Yuliati, 2013, p. 52). Formerly labeled ‘style of discourse’ (Toumi, 2009, p. 166), the concept of tenor of discourse is a contextual variable which is intimately related to the interpersonal meaning. Martin (2009) argues that tenor is concerned with the different social relations established by discourse participants and are

established through the expression of power relations and solidarity (p.159). Based on these dimensions of power and solidarity, Eggins (1994, 2004) whose definition of tenor is “the social role relationships played by interactants”, breaks (referring to Cate Poynton, 1985, p90) this contextual variable into three categories, which are ‘power’, ‘affective involvement’, and ‘contact’. Moreover, most studies on tenor, Amoussou (2014a, p. 149) notes, focused on mood and modality analysis, the modality and adjunct types.

As for modality, it is viewed by Bloor and Bloor (2004, p. 55) as a component of interpersonal meaning whose function is to show different shades of the speaker’s attitude to the message or his/her commitment on its relevance, reliability, interest and so on. Halliday and Matthiessen (2004, p. 147) emphasise the role of modality and posit that the system of modality is used to determine the level of uncertainty that is in between the extreme positive and negative. In addition, Garcia (2000) contends that modality is broken into two components: epistemic modality and deontic/root modality.

There have been different approaches to the study of mood and modality. Amoussou (2015) studied mood and interpersonal meanings in the two versions of ‘Abiku’, by J.P. Clark and Wole Soyinka. He identifies the differences in the ideological perspectives of the two poets through their mood and modal choices. The analysis includes both the quantitative and qualitative in order to see the dominant mood choices, from which the author concludes that one poet was firm and authoritative while the other was mocking. The tussle for power and hierarchy inherent in the two poems is seen through the analysis of modality and modalisation. Aboulalaei (2013) also looks at the variants in the use of mood and modality between Iranian men and women, when writing academic articles. He concludes that the distribution of modals in females’ articles are more than the males’ and that interactional elements, such as modal verbs contribute to a successful dialogic negotiation of knowledge in academic writings.

In Wang’s (2014, p.258) opinion, the interpersonal metafunction has been given less attention in researches, compared to the ideational and textual metafunctions, despite the fact that it is central to human communication. This might be due to the fact that the interpersonal meaning is more complex and less systematic. In Wang’s (2014) study of the interpersonal connotations and perspectives of the biblical language, the author carries out the study using the macro and micro levels of analysis. This includes mood, modality and interpersonal metaphor. He is then able to conclude in the end, that there are elements of interpersonal meaning in the Bible, which allows a closer rapport between God and His people. Positive interpersonal relations are established through mood and modality.

Traditionally, Computer-mediated discourse refers to those forms of communication that take place through computer-mediated formats (instant messages, emails, chat rooms. In recent times, however, the term now covers other types of text-based interaction such as text messaging. Studies on CMC have focused mainly on the social effects of different computer-supported communication technologies. Many recent studies involve internet-based social networking supported by social software. The act of commenting on news report however is an

aspect of Computer Mediated Communication known as newsgroup (Taiwo 2015). On these platforms, readers are able to bare their minds and pass comments on the different stories posted on the site. These stories range from political to social and even entertainment.

Internet interlocutors (also known as online interactants, netizens or textizens in the case of regular SMS text composers/senders) make use of textual data to convey and exchange their thoughts, opinions, observations, feelings, as well as messages from other people or sources. These interactive possibilities make CMC a technology, medium, and engine of social relations (Jones, 1995, p. 11) and language use is at the core. Text-based CMC then refers to the production of human language mostly in typed form (comprising alphanumeric characters), visually displayed on a computer or mobile phone screen(s) and the dissemination of such via networked computers or wireless technologies (Ifukor, 2010, p. 1).

In the words of Ifukor (2010, p. 3), when it comes to modality, Computer-mediated communication in its textual form seems to have one of the most simulating forms of writing that encourages some features of speech. CMC is a representation of human coding system of language, it contains the virtual and visual translations of human language, as well as other pragmatic nuances of language that are used in human daily interactions. In much the same way, Thurlow *et al* (2004, p. 126) argue that the language of the internet has more features of speech than writing, despite the fact that it is typed and not carried out in a face-to-face situation. Sebba (2007, p. 6) notes that when writing, language is visibly represented in Computer-Mediated Communication and “issues of language as a formal object and of language as a social and cultural phenomenon intersect as it touches on matters of social identity, national identity, cultural politics, representation and voice”. To him, the dialectal and social norms issues are brought to the fore, this also includes the issue of variation in language. Social media is classified under the new media genre whose main focus is social relations and networks, which also gives room for free expression, interactions and sharing of information by its users. The genre also gives freedom for online users to air their views with little or no census.

According to Chatora (2012) the fact that these genres allow for interaction and collaboration gives them the social nature attached to them. Mayfield (2008, p. 33) describes these media as “online platforms that promote participation, openness, conversation and connectedness”. Akinwunmi (2011, p. 41), sees them as ‘social instruments of magazines’. They are also viewed and described as virtual contents that are developed using technological tools that are easily accessible for people, to share information that cuts across spatial and temporal boundaries and enabling people to form relations. (Adibe *et al.*, 2011).

Online forums are known for their numerous posts, ranging from ‘very serious’ issues to purely entertaining ones. The content of a blog is liable to liberty of the blogger; bloggers write whatsoever they want to write about. As a result, the content, quality and ambition of most blogs vary (Walker, 2003). Some online forums discuss varying subjects on different topics, while some are somewhat restricted in their topics of discussion. Online forums such as *FIN*

(Female In) and *Mamallette* are female-oriented, while blogs have segments for the two genders. The biological gender and the socially constructed gender are concepts of gender. The most acceptable classifications of gender in Nigeria are usually biological – male vs. female category. Though there are other gender classifications, the gender binary adopted for the in this study is, therefore, male and female category.

The last several decades have seen an array of research on the nature and existence of differences between men and women most importantly the language difference According to Collet *et al.* (2004), this popularity stems, in part, from the fact that language is an inherently social phenomenon and can provide insight into how men and women approach their social worlds. Gender differences in language use often show complexity in combination of social goals, situational demands, and socialisation (Newman *et al.*, 2008). In social sciences context, men use language for the main purpose of passing information whereas women use verbal interaction for social purposes (Colley *et al.*, 2004). I don't believe this stereotype though...

Thomson and Murachver's (2001) study of e-mail communication observe the use of present tense equality in men and women to ask questions; offer compliments, apologies, and opinions and to hurl insults at their "net pal". Mulac *et al* (2000), in his study which compare 36 female and 50 male managers in a role play, *men* used significantly more negations and asked more questions, and the women who used more directives. The study conclude that men use more words overall, whereas women used longer sentences. This may be due to different contexts in which the language samples were generated which deduced the size and direction of the gender differences.

According to Kray and Thompson (2004), the differences that arise due to gender are categorised into two. The first concerns the differentiation in the hierarchy of the two genders; this includes the differences in status, power and influence. The second category covers the social differences; this includes the differences in the need for social relations, social connections, the sense of belonging and taking care of others. The social integration axis corresponds most closely with the notion of "beyond yourself." The current study falls under the second category of social differences.

Theoretical Framework

Tannen's (1990) difference theory presents gender differences in form of binary opposition, it implies that the way women and men speak is shaped by their sociological inclinations. The theory has its basis on the idea that men and women have different but equally valid communicative styles. Both male and female posts are subjected to the two binary oppositions. The difference theory has been represented in six contrasts:

- 1. Status vs. support:** This claims that men talk to show their status while women want support. The use of 'I' as the opinion holder is used to measure the level at which the two genders try to attain status. Polar interrogatives are used to measure the level at which each gender seeks for support in their posts.

2. **Independence vs. intimacy:** The implied notions in the conclusions of each poster is considered here. Generally, women often think in terms of closeness and support, and struggle to preserve intimacy. Men, concerned with status, often focus more on independence.
3. **Advice vs. understanding:** The different structures used to seek for advice are examined under this binary opposition. The analysis elucidates the use of wh-questions to ask for advice. The posts that do not seek for advice will be categorised as those that only seeks understanding.
4. **Information vs. feelings:** The lexical verbs used by each gender are considered here. Only verbs are considered because they describe both actions and feelings. The lexical verbs used are further categorised into emotive and action verbs. Emotive verbs in this context, refer to those verbs that are capable of arousing feelings and emotions, while action (also known as dynamic) verbs refer to those that express a physical action. Action verbs used to inform, and emotive verbs to express feelings are accounted for under this category.
5. **Orders vs. proposals:** This notion implies that women often suggest that people do things in indirect ways while men may prefer a direct imperative. This nugget is not applied to the current study because of the nature of the online forum used, which neither suggests order nor proposal.
6. **Conflict vs. compromise:** The manner with which each poster concludes their story is examined here. The posts that end with the poster showing ‘resistance’ are classified as conflicting while those that ‘accede’ (shows readiness to resolve issues/conflicts) are seen as compromising.

Methodology and Data Analysis

This study is an online analytical research, that employs a purposively sampled data from two Nigerian online forums to elicit the patterns of interpersonal meanings in selected posts. The study engages a descriptive design, focusing on unaltered samples of naturally-occurring language use in specific contexts. The study employs 30 purposively sampled data from two Nigerian online forums on various gender-related issues (viz.: heterosexual relationships, marriages, divorce and sexual satisfaction) in Nigeria. The data are gathered from *Mamalette* and Stella Dimoko Korkus’ *Stand Alone Narratives*. *Mamalette* is a ‘strictly female’ online forum that posts up to ten or more stories daily from members, Stella Dimokoko Korkus’ *Stand Alone Narratives* section also contains stories by members of the blog. The two platforms were chosen because they have a comparatively high level of patronage and they allow for originality as the stories are presented as written by the person concerned (without alterations from the blogger or admin). The data were downloaded between January to June because gender issues started popping up more due to the story of a woman that was allegedly beaten to death by her husband. The internet witnessed several gender-related issues during this period more than before.

The data was analysed using Tannen’s (1990) difference theory. The male posts are numbered MP1 to 15 while the female posts, FP1 to 15 for easy referencing. The following is a list of abbreviated titles that capture the theme of the posts.

- **FP1** – Chronicle of a Snooper
- **FP2** – Too young to be married?
- **FP3** – Boyfriend ‘snatched’ by best friend
- **FP4** – When the abuser tags along
- **FP5** – Rich girl; poor pastor
- **FP6** – Advising a friend when you are in the know
- **FP7** – When the past confronts you
- **FP8** – Rich family brouhaha
- **FP9** – Small beyond belief
- **FP10** – SOS advice needed
- **FP11** – Dealing with a cheat
- **FP12** – Babymama by mistake
- **FP13** – Prayed for a knight in shining armour and got the opposite
- **FP14** – Confused boyfriend
- **FP15** – Torn between three men
- **MP1** – Babe has changed
- **MP2** – Liar from the *singles mingles forum*
- **MP3** – When saying the truth is not an option
- **MP4** – Choosing between babymama and girlfriend
- **MP5** – Confused and at a crossroad
- **MP6** – Wicked husband
- **MP7** – Dating wife’s best friend
- **MP8** – Rantings of a starved husband
- **MP9** – Marriage in trouble
- **MP10** – Obsessed with my wife
- **MP11** – Kindness taken for granted
- **MP12** – Catholic versus Anglican brouhaha
- **MP13** – My depression story
- **MP14** – Choosing between ‘ex’ and new girlfriend
- **MP15** – The cheating wife

The data is subjected to five of Deborah Tannen’s six notions, to deduce the gendered differences in the language use and in the expression of interpersonal meaning. Most of the analyses are comparative (male vs. female) in line with the notions used; these include the notions of status vs. support, independence vs. intimacy, advice vs. understanding, information vs. feeling and conflict vs. compromise.

1. Status vs. Support

According to Tannen (1990), the notion of status posits that men see conversations as a competition, in which they have to achieve upper hand and prevent others from dominating

them (thereby showing their status). The two genders show status and support in different ways. These are expatiated below:

(a) Status

To achieve status, posters make use of different strategies that are highlighted and explained in the following sections.

The pro-nominal ‘I’

The use of ‘I’ as the opinion holder is used for measuring the level at which the two genders try to attain **status**. Men try to attain and maintain status in the data through the use of ‘I’. In the following excerpt from the post of a man, ‘I’ is used thirteen times.

1. “...So I thought it was coz of pregnancy coz she got pregnant almost immediately after the wedding. I endured all this until she put to bed. After that I gave her about three months to heal from child’s birth. But as I am talking to you now, I’ve not slept with my wife for almost a month now. Stella, I am not a sex freak, I don’t ask for it regularly, but when I do I am denied it. I am fed up of the whole thing and I can’t endure it again. Stella, I am one of those few people that can boldly tell you my wife is very hot...” (MP8)
2. “...I had my reservations cos as I said he didn’t fit into my kind of man...he talks loud and always in my local language, though he claims he is a graduate, which I doubt...I also got to find out he was once married for 9years with 2kids...I couldn’t be bothered...somehow I found him to be someone I would tell how my day went...he visited the town where I live...and I knew I wasn’t into him...” (FP13)

In example 1, the writer makes the post all about him to show status. He mentions himself in every paragraph of the post; confirming the notion of status in men. The poster believes he must be sexually satisfied despite his wife’s conditions (pregnancy and delivery). The use of ‘I’ and its variant ‘my’ also connotes ownership, both of the wife and the marriage (being in charge of the marriage).

Women also make use of self-mentions as in Example 2, the female poster uses ‘I’ as the opinion holder. She uses ‘I’ and its variant ‘my’, to show the connection between her and the narrative. She expresses more of her personal feelings and opinions through the pro-nominals than ownership or status. This depicts the poster is more concerned with showing the story is authentic and strictly her narration, than showing status or ability. The data therefore supports Tannen’s (1990) binary opposition that men seek status more than women but disagrees with Mehl and Pennbaker’s (2003) submission that women are more likely to use first person singular than men.

(b) Support

This notion submits that women want to gain confirmation and support for their ideas rather than portray status. Both men and women, however, seek confirmation and support for their

ideas by using the polar interrogatives. Through the polar interrogatives, they seek support by asking readers what to do:

3. “Has anyone been through what I am going through and can advise? Please I need help.” (MP9)
4. “Should I believe her? Should I allow her to continue to stay with me” (MP11)
5. “I am 34 and have no relationship except this...should I settle for this or still wait for my imaginary knight in shining armour?” (FP13)
6. “Should I hold on to hope of his prosperity and keep trying to pray for him...has anyone ever gone through this...did things get better in the end?”
7. Is it a waste of time being with a broke man though he has a lot of potential? Should I kuku change direction and find myself a Mr. B. is there hope of finding another guy who’s not having hardships like this?...can a parent understand an only child that tells them that she fell in love with such a guy or would the average parent be disappointed?” (FP5)

Male posters make use of polar interrogatives, as seen in examples 4 and 5. The posters seem to be in a dilemma, and ask the readers for advice. Most of the male posters asking for advice and soliciting support narrate relationship issues. Through the polar questions, the posters portray their need for the readers’ advice and support.

Female posters also use the polar interrogatives to seek the readers’ opinion and support on the issues presented in their posts. They make use of multiple polar structures as in examples 6 and 7; example 6 has three polar interrogatives used together, while example 7 has seven polar interrogatives. This portrays the poster as being in a very confused state of mind, and in need of advice and support, as the case may be. Both the male and female posters seek the readers’ support in their posts. Females, however, seem to ask for support more than men, as seen in the illustrations above.

2. Independence vs. Intimacy

According to Tannen (1990), women generally think in terms of closeness and support and struggle to preserve intimacy while men, concerned with status, often focus more on independence. Most of the posters come out to tell fellow online users about their experiences. They, however, end these posts on different notes. The notion of independence here is considered from two perspectives. Is the poster ready to find solutions to the issues presented? Or is the poster considering giving up on his/her spouse.

(a) Independence

This notion indicates that men focus on independence because they are concerned with preserving their status. Here, posts that are considering giving up on their spouses are expatiated. The different ways posters reflect the notion of independence are illustrated below.

8. “Stella and fellow BVs, what do you advise me to do. Cos me am thinking of looking for somebody to satisfy me...’ (MP8)
9. “I have always judged men who cheat on their wives and will tell my friends off if I realise they are doing so. Guess what, I’m already thinking I need to get someone who will satisfy my sexual needs...” (MP9)
10. “Since I took the boy from her in December, she has never ask about the boy and to be very sincere, all our years together I never cheated on her for once, even when I had the opportunity to do so. It is pathetic and I promised never to marry again as the experience was bad...” (MP15)
11. “To say I was broken is an understatement. Things I’d told him in confidence, this woman was telling me. He even lied to me that he met her on Badoo. Imagine...But snooping saved me sha o. At least I knew who I was dealing with. We’re still together. But I don’t trust him. I can’t marry him and I’m just using him...” (FP1)

In examples 8-10, the male posters express the notion of independence. Two of the male posters (Examples 8 and 9) intend to go outside their marriage to ‘look for someone to satisfy their sexual needs’. Both posters are married men whose wives have been ‘denying’ sexually. They, therefore, come to the platform to narrate their experiences. Though they seem aggrieved with the situation in their homes, they both say they would opt for extra marital affairs, in order to satisfy their sexual needs. It is also important to note that the two men only wanted to seek for sexual satisfaction outside their marriages, they did not show the intention of leaving the marriage.

The three men who express the notion of independence in their posts as seen in examples 8-10 above are all married men. They all seem to have given up on their spouses as their expectations are not met in the marriage. This implies that marriage empowers men and gives them certain rights and privileges; therefore, when they sense these rights being trampled upon, especially by their wives, they ‘revolt’. This is what they express through the notion of independence.

In example 11, a female poster expresses the notion of independence too. The lady claims to have caught her boyfriend cheating on her, with a married woman. The notion of independence expressed by the lady might be because the lady is not married to the guy yet. It, therefore, seems that posters that express the notion of independence, as in the illustrations above, have either been jilted or feel cheated.

(b) Intimacy

The notion of intimacy suggests that women often struggle to preserve intimacy. Posts that express intentions of solving ‘issues’ with their partners are considered here. Some male posts express the notion of intimacy as in the following excerpts:

12. “Please I want people’s opinion and advice on what to do and how best to solve these issues. I love my wife so much and don’t want that to change or anything stop me from loving her...” (MP10)

13. “Please Stella and beeves, advice a brother. Put yourself in my shoes and tell me what you’ll do if you were in my shoes. I would also appreciate the advice of those who have been in my shoes before, how did you cope, what did you do and how did you do it?” (MP14)

In examples 12 and 13 above, the male posters want to preserve the relationship they have with their spouses. The poster in example 12 professes his love to his wife and claims he does not want anything to stop him from loving her, while in example 13, the poster asks for advice on how to keep the relationship he has with his girlfriend. The two examples are illustrations of the fact that men also desire to keep intimacy. This might be because the men’s identities are preserved on the platform; they can express their emotions freely without the fear of being tagged ‘weak’ like women.

Evidence from the data negates Tannen’s (1990) strict notion that men express the notion of independence rather than intimacy. This is because seventy-three percent (73%) of men’s post support the notion of intimacy. An online forum shields the identity of its users, different emotions are, therefore, expressed freely without the fear of being recognised or castigated. This lack of a recognisable identity might be the reason why men express the notion of intimacy as in examples 12 and 13 above. The data reveals the need for intimacy by men, which they might not express in a real-life conversation. Online forums, therefore, seem to give room for a free atmosphere to unmask concealed feelings and emotions that will otherwise not be expressed.

Female posters also express the notion of intimacy in the data, as illustrated below:

14. “...I am already falling in love with him and he is so near perfect. I am scared of what our sex life would be like. Though I am not the sexually freaked kinda person, I’ve only had sex with one person and that was years ago but I am scared of how it will be when we eventually get married...also I am scared of our male children inheriting such blokos...To my questions: Is small blokos hereditary? To those who have dated or married guys with small blokos, how does it feel like and how did you cope after child birth? (FP9)
15. “...He’s not even a two mins indomie man, he’s a one seconds man. How do I cope with this for the rest of my life? He’s saying this has never happened to him before, could be stress, please what kind of stress is that. I am giving him time to get his act together. He’s just 40 years. What could be the problem? What options do I have here? I am just 25, how can I deal with this for the rest of my life? Please suggestions on how to help him.” (FP14)

In the excerpts above, female posters express the notion of intimacy. In example 13, the poster claims her boyfriend’s sexual organ is small (small blokos). Despite this, she is considering marrying him because she is ‘already falling in love’ and the guy is ‘so near perfect’. This

suggests she is not thinking of leaving her boyfriend, rather she wants to know how she can *cope* with the problem.

The poster in example 14 is a married woman, whose husband does not last long in bed. According to her he is a 'one second man'. The poster sees marriage as a life-long 'contract' she signed with her husband, and would rather want to preserve the intimacy they share. This display of the need for intimacy by males in the data agrees with Trevino, Webster and Stein's (2000) position that anonymity in online communication may break the stereotype that sees women as more emotionally expressive of the genders; as men also show the need for intimacy in their posts.

3. Advice vs. Understanding

According to Tannen (1990, p.57), this notion claims that to many men, a complaint is a way of seeking a solution, while to women, they just want to be understood and empathised with.

(a) Advice

In this section, posts that express the notion of advice are illustrated and explained. The different ways posters seek advice from netizens on what they should do are examined here.

15. "I am 34 and have no relationship except this...should I settle for this or still wait for my imaginary knight in shining armour? Please only sincere advices... (FP13)
16. "I am weak, but after my last break up, I promised myself not to cry over a man again...Now I have her number. I just need advice. Should I call and threaten her just for the fun of it or I should just keep it up and collect the money he is collecting from her till I am tired. Or is there any other revenge I can carry out?" (FP11)
17. "Please Stella and beebes, advice a brother. Put yourself in my shoes and tell me what you'll do if you were in my shoes. I would also appreciate the advice of those who have been in my shoes before, how did you cope, what did you do and how did you do it?" (MP14)

Both male and female posters seek advice, as illustrated above. Examples 15 and 16, however, seek advice without asking to be understood. These posters simply ask for people's opinion and what they should do, without appealing to their emotions. In the examples above, the posters narrate their stories and simply ask for advice. The posters, however, seem to be more interested in the advice of someone who has experienced what they are currently going through.

Almost all the posters come to the platform to seek netizen's advice and opinion on what they should do. This seems to be one of the aims of these platforms (for people to post their stories and ask fellow online users for advice). The online forums are therefore serving their purpose in this regard. Though Tannen (1990) suggests men's complaint is a challenge to find a solution, it turns out women too are out to find solution, rather than just being understood.

(b) Understanding

This section discusses the posts that seek the understanding of their readers. Posts that express the notion of understanding, asking for the sympathy of the readers are illustrated here.

18. "I'm in my final year in the University, almost done with school, I'm a sucker for handsome guys and I'm lucky to have three. Yes, there are three men in my life and that's cheating but I learned not to put my eggs in one basket in a very hard way...I know it's no excuse but I'm having a hard time deciding who I'll focus on fully. Help a sister out." (FP15)
19. "Last year, I begged her to reconsider her choice of a spouse. She changed the topic to something irrelevant...I am begging her to at least move it till October...I really do not know if I am paranoid or if I should keep quiet and just mind my business. I love this girl like a sister and would not want her to make a mistake coz I know she will regret it for life and end up blaming God...Please advice is needed." (FP6)
20. "House, before you all crucify me, sleeping with her friend is wrong, I was foolish to think they were no longer close, I acted on a long nursed crush. Cheating has no exceptions but truth is there is forgivable cheating..." (MP7)
21. "...Apparently she got married and wasn't enjoying her marriage because her husband is always travelling. This is someone I dreamt of starting a life with. I feel used and deceived. Still in shock but I'll have to move on. I blame myself for being blind to the signs that might have shown up. I so wanted to announce our wedding date. I am hurting and don't know if I can take another heartbreak. It's really painful and I'm emotionally down. Gradually slipping back into my old shell and I don't want that as it is beginning to affect my work and relationship with peeps. How do I forget her and move on? I am trying to move on but my reserved nature is an hindrance as I am still hurting...I need a major distraction..." (MP2)

Some posts seek the readers' understanding without asking for advice (Example 20). The post narrates the story of a man who slept with his wife's best friend. He, however, says 'there is forgivable cheating', this implies he expects the readers to understand 'his plight' and that the cheating should not be taken against him, as it is 'forgivable'. He also says 'Before you all crucify me', this connotes his knowledge of his 'unacceptable behaviour' in the society. By saying this, he does not only appeal to the readers' understanding but sympathy.

Other posts seek the readers' advice as well as their understanding. In example 18, the poster claims to be 'having a hard time deciding' who to choose among three suitors. She also calls on the readers to 'Help a sister out'. Posters make use of different emotive verbs like 'regret', portray themselves as the 'victim', in order to appeal to the emotions of the readers. It, therefore, seems important to the posters that the readers understand and support them.

The data further negates Tannen's (1990) notion that men are more concerned with finding a solution (through advice) and women just want to be understood and sympathised with. The data suggests both men and women want to be understood and sympathised with.

4. Information vs. Feelings:

A piece of information expresses facts about a situation, person or event, while feelings have to do with experiencing emotions. According to Tannen (1990), the notion of information versus feeling suggests that men primarily want to inform as well as educate in conversations, while women's primary purpose is to express feelings and emotions. The lexical verbs used by each gender is considered here. Only verbs are considered because they describe actions and feelings.

The lexical verbs used are further categorised into emotive and action verbs. Emotive verbs in this context, are verbs that show or are capable of arousing intense feelings while action verbs (also known as dynamic verbs) express actions. The emotive verbs are used to account for expression of feelings while action verbs cater for the expression of information. The data is subjected to a quantitative analysis to deduce the number of emotive and action verbs used by each gender.

Female posters use more emotive verbs than male posters while male posters use action verbs more than female posters. FP4 has the highest number of emotive verbs in the data (69), followed by FP1 (59) and FP12 (43). The three posts have one theme in common, which is 'emotional trauma'. The three posts narrate emotional stories and the verbs used capture this. Though female posts make use of emotive verbs more in their stories, they also make use of action verbs, to show what they can do. Male posters use more action verbs than emotive verbs. The male post with the highest number of action verbs is MP15 (80), followed by MP11 (79) and MP6 (52). Like the female posters, the male posts also discuss emotional issues. they therefore make use of emotive verbs too, though not as much as females.

The data supports the notion of information vs. feeling. It therefore seems that females remain more emotional than males, even on online forums. This agrees with Denham et al (2003) and Parkins (2012) who believe gender stereotypes still make women more emotionally expressive on online forums. This is because they use more emotive verbs than action verbs.

5. Conflict vs. Compromise

Conflict has to do with an active disagreement between people with opposing opinions and ideas, while compromise means an agreement in an argument where the people involved reduce their demands or change their opinions in order to agree. Under this binary nugget, the use of high/low modality by the two genders is considered. How men often 'resist vocally' and how women 'accede' in different situations is analysed.

(a) Conflict

In this section, cases where the posters reflect conflict (resisting vocally), are illustrated and explained. The following are instances of where males 'resist vocally':

23. “Apart from having kids, I also have sexual needs which I believed getting married will solve but I have been disappointed. I have always judged men who cheat on their wives and will tell my friend off if I realise they are doing so. Guess what, I am already thinking I need to get someone who will satisfy my needs. (MP9)
24. “...I don’t ask for it regularly. But when I do am denied it. I’m fed up of the whole thing and can’t endure it again...the day she decide to give me na so so rules and regulation, I no go even enjoy am again. I’m tired...now I sleep in the sitting room cuz of anger...what do you advise me to do coz me am thinking of looking for somebody to satisfy me...” (MP8)
25. “...But snooping has saved me sha o. at least I know who I was dealing with. We’re still together but I don’t trust him. I can’t marry him and I’m just using him...” (FP1)

In the excerpts above, the two men in examples 23 and 24 express their displeasure with high modality “I’m fed up of the whole thing and cannot endure it again”, “I have always judged men who cheat on their wives...” They however *resisted vocally* by looking for solutions outside their marriages. They claim they are ‘tired’, which is a sign of conflict in the marriage. The data reflects married men’s claim of right and ownership of their wives, which is typical of the patriarchal Nigerian society. Only married men resist vocally in the data, while others who are still courting their spouses do not show signs of conflict.

Few female posts resist vocally. The poster in example 25 seems to have given up on her current relationship. She says she does not trust him anymore but just wants to use him. The poster snooped on her boyfriend and finds out he is cheating with some girls and a married woman.

(b) Compromise

The analysis here centres on posts that do not display conflict, but rather accede, in order to resolve the conflict. Some female posts accede as in the following examples:

26. “...He is not even a 1mins man, he is a 30 seconds *Indomie* man. What could be the problem? I know he had a spine correction some years back but I don’t think that is the issue. What options do I have here? I am just 25, how can I deal with tis for the rest of my life? Please suggestions on how to help him.” (FP14)
27. “...I’m just so confused and I’m tired of thinking too much. I promised myself not to complain anymore since it doesn’t change anything and take the relationship just the way it is. I dunno if I’m taking the right decision or not?” (FP11)
28. “Please I want people’s opinions and advice on what to do and how best to solve the issues. I love my wife so much and don’t want that to change or anything to stop me from loving her. Meanwhile, in the other hand, I am not happy because all these things are hurting me so much...” (MP10)
29. “she doesn’t talk with me and I am lonely, depressed and gradually dying cos I feel very guilty of all I did to her. I am so sorry for my behaviour towards her. I know I wronged

her and for her request for divorce, I know she is justified, but please, I am sorry....pls Grace, I am sorry, pls forgive me, I don't want a divorce...” (MP6)

In the instances above, the female posters show compromise. The poster's husband in example 26 cannot last long in bed. According to her, the husband is a '30 seconds man'. This implies the husband ejaculates too early. This is giving the poster concern as she does not enjoy her sexual life. Despite this, the woman asks the readers the 'options she has', and 'suggestions on how to help him'. This is a sign of compromise, as she wants a solution to her marital problems. The female posters seem to accede despite their displeasure.

In other instances, the men do not resist (portray conflict) but accede (compromise) as seen in examples 28 and 29. In example 28, the poster claims he is obsessed with his wife and cannot get enough of his wife's love and attention. This shows compromise, as the poster does not want the marriage to end on this note. The poster in example 29 confesses to maltreating his wife for a long time. He claims he beats the wife and tells his families lies about her. The woman has, however, stayed with him despite this but she no longer wants to have anything to do with him anymore. The poster asks the readers to beg his wife on his behalf, as he is 'lonely, depressed and feels guilty'. He also does not want to divorce his wife. This implies he does not want the marriage to end despite his past behaviour.

Three male posts resist vocally (MP 8, 9 and 15), two accede (MP6 and 10) while ten neither accede nor resist vocally. These ten posts present their issues in an uncertain way; not sure of what to do and call on commenters to advise them appropriately. In the same vein, more female posts seem confused while some accede and few resist vocally. Online forum, therefore, is presented as the platform for resolving social issues. Posters come online to present their different issues and expect the readers to advise, correct, chastise and provide solutions, as the case may be.

Discussion of Findings and Conclusion

The data supports Tannen's notion of status vs. support as men seek to protect and maintain their status more than women. Females on the other hand seek for support more than men. Male posters use the pro-nominal 'I' to show domination and self-centredness, while female posters use it to portray the connection between them and their narratives. Female posters express more of their personal feelings than the notion of ownership or status expressed by male posters. Male posters also show status through their display of ability while female posters rarely reflect this. Both male and female posters seek support in their posts through polar interrogatives; females, however, seek support more than men in their posts.

The data negates Tannen's (1990) strict notion that men express the notion of independence rather than intimacy. This is because more male posts support the notion of intimacy rather than independence in the data. This suggests that online forums allow for free expression of emotions (which are otherwise concealed in a real-life conversation) by men.

The study also supports the notion of information vs. feeling, as females seem to be more emotional than males, even in online forums. Adult males appear to be more concerned with expressing what they have done than what they feel. The data does not support the notion of order vs. proposal, as neither the male nor female posts use the exclusive and inclusive imperatives. They (posters) rather present their 'problems' and ask for advice or solutions, as the case may be. Few male posts express the notion of conflict, few support the notion of compromise; the larger percentage however appear to be confused – they are not sure if they should go ahead with the 'conflict' or 'compromise'. Online forums, therefore, appear to be the platform for the resolution of social issues, more than forums that express conflict or compromise.

The study concludes that online discourse also allows for freedom for posters and commenters to position themselves interpersonally. The study reflects men's crave for intimacy, support and the need to be understood, despite their show of 'manliness' and 'strength'. The data portray men as those who display emotions they would probably not have displayed in real life conversations. The research suggests that Tannen's description of gender difference cannot be followed strictly in the analysis of gender differences as there are more to gender difference than her six nuggets of analysis.

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