A STYLISTIC ANALYSIS OF SOME LINGUISTIC EXPRESSIONS OF
THE NEW INFORMATION AGE
WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF FEMINISM AND
INDIGENOUS CULTURE

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DORCAS MOFOLUWAKE AKANDE
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH, FACULTY OF ARTS
OBAFEMI AWOLOWO UNIVERSITY,
ILE-IFE, OSUN STATE, NIGERIA.

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This international conference is for all who care passionately about
improving women’s position in the world, who demand justice and full
human rights for women everywhere and who believe that a feminist
analysis is essential to defining a fairer globalised world.
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ABSTRACT
Sometimes what is required to communicate – to establish a reciprocal "we" - is rupture and break – a refusal to accept the common ground laid down by the "other"

Richard J. Bernstein
"The Rage Against Reason (1986:206)
Language is a veritable instrument of communication.

It is a powerful tool of self as well as collective expression within a class, race, culture, and gender. It may be used effectively to construct or deconstruct. Within an ideology, Language is the index of movement to achieving goals of awareness, reconstruction and reformation.

This paper thus seeks to reflect on some of the linguistic expressions commonly used in the arena of feminists in the New Information age and its implication(s) in terms of building a tight – knit coalition of sisterhood or conversely as it were further entrenching the divide between women in the developed and developing worlds, paying attention to indigenous ways of perception and integration within global scheme of villagizing. Furthermore, this reflection will be contextualized within the IFU experience in order to view how it expressed itself within this realm and possibly provoke a consciousness of creating a linguistic reformatory inclusiveness in its future agenda.

Introduction

The reality of existence is frame worked in hierarchy and the control of power in all spheres of social, political, economic and to a significant degree, religious interactions. It would then be euphoric to postulate of a future of total equality amongst all peoples of different cultures, gender, race and religions whether intra or internationally, in the domestic and in the public domain. The vision of (re) creating an enabling global environment however, where every individual, people and culture is at liberty to express their distinctly unique human and spiritual essence in whichever manner, mode or method needed, desired or found comfortable, in so far as it does not result in the subversion of basic universally accepted law and understanding of peaceable and harmonious co-existence, is far from unachievable.
This then brings to the fore how the gender issue is being addressed among feminists of various persuasions and cultures such that the questions posed against patriarchal tenants will not boomerang in its reinforcement. Looking at the perspective of sisterhood between women in industrialized nations and those from indigenous cultures, are the following observations:

(i) The heritage of women from the dominant cultures has heretofore interfered with their ability to understand other cultures in their full difference from their own (Fishburn 1986:21).

(ii) That women from Western intellectual tradition are "biased" toward attenuating the importance of alien cultural differences (Marcus and Fischer 1986:38). According to the opinion of the two latter critiques the bias in this direction is precisely due to the fact that those in the west "conceive of the self as atomistic, autonomous, and originating outside or prior to society." This is further buttressed in what Iris Marion Young (1990b:45) refers to as "illusory? metaphysics of a unified self - making subjectivity.

Indeed, there is a contradiction in terms in western feminists' approach which aim at affirming an international sisterhood and eradicating sexism in the assumption that they are under the same condition of similarity and sameness. Thus, the full realization of this vision is far- fetched most especially as the fundamental issue of perception is still questionable as reflected in the language of reference to be examined which mark out two distinct dichotomy; the leader and the follower, the powerful and the powerless, the initiator and the initiated, the developed and the underdeveloped.

Fishburn (1986:17-18) enunciated the need for those in the position of power and control to be more sincere in their claim of the desire to understand the belief of "other" or alien culture by "extending their categories of thought." She goes on to explain that this extension must also include the modification or even outright rejection of old models of interpretation even if only for the sake of the virtue of cultural and intellectual humility. It is believed that doing so should allow the "powerful" to learn how other cultures organize and explain the world, such that it leads to a better understanding of their own epistemology which should be seen as one of many systems of knowledge.

A Sense Of Attempt

Steps to address the problem of gender gap, bias and stereotyping has been pondered and implemented in recent times, such that globally donor agents from the developed world have committed generous financial back ups to NGOs to promote these various ameliorative agenda, particularly in the developing nations. Despite this however, little or no attention has been paid to the issue of the promotion of self expression and elevation of the knowledge of women from indigenous cultures, which should be regarded as an integral part of who they are and what they are, without any apology. For how can women leaders within the feminist fold crusading for empowerment of `sisters' all over the globe, claim to be in truth viable and credible when the totality of what some of their counterparts represent has been given linguistic labels of inferiority and
inconsequentiality, particularly in the area of initiating conclusions of feminist conceptualization paradigms, research questions and analysis within feminist movement and discourse. In short, women from indigenous cultures have been sorely marginalized in the areas that matter most in leading the crusade in the coalition for women empowerment, and thereby reproducing the masculine culture.

The implication of this is aptly foregrounded by Sandra Hardings (1998:148-150) in what she refers to as a heavy construct or "ruling group interest'. The ruling group owns the language and creates the expressions which aid in the sustenance of their interest, perspective and theory. The ruling group ascribes power and relevance or powerlessness and irrelevance. Still, it takes a critical linguistic consciousness to see beneath the surfaces of social life to the realities that structure it.

The need to be more perceptive in all issues of identity, democracy and empowerment; components of globalization, cannot be over emphasized, particularly in this era of New Information and Technology. For if indeed the world must become one village, and a harmonious one to boot, where women constitute over 50% of the key players, then the role women are playing to promote and accommodate each other's unique and diverse equal participation is a challenge that must be embraced. Contributions based on other cultural awareness and knowledge formation should not be subverted.

The Language Question

The continuation of a culture of domination that has marked historically, the interaction between the developed and the developing world have been strengthened by the language used as a defining tool in the location of peoples and their culture, by the dominant culture of the West. This has traversed into feminist dynamics, in an inevitable manner that will ultimately corrode the fundamental core of 'Sisterhood' principle. Gadamer (1989:227) surmise that what is brought along into an expression are 'prejudices', similar to the way one examines a foreign text.

Along this line of thought also is the submission that some of these prejudices are legitimate or enabling and permit understanding, while others are disenabling and actually obstructive of understanding.

From this view however, in order to achieve understanding whenever an `other' is encountered, there must be a preparation to accept the fact that others are 'potentially right' and allow them to prevail against us (Gadamer 1987:87). The implication of this with regard to words used to ascribe identity to `others' and their knowledge package is that it must be as neutral as possible.

A Stylistic Approach as Reinforcement

The perspective from which style has been defined and analyzed include those of the writer's point of view (i.e. the dominate culture's point of view), the characteristics of the text being analyzed (in this case expressions created to ascribe identity by the dominant
culture), and the impression of the reader (interpreters of words of reference from developed and developing worlds). Correspondingly, style has been described as: the shell of thought, the choice between alternative expressions, a set of individual characteristics amongst others. Crystal and Davy (1969: 9-10) attempt an encompassing listing when they relate style to the distinctive language habits of an individual, a group, or a period, and also in a restricted sense to the effectiveness or otherwise of an expression. Oloruntoba-Oju (1998: vi) says that significance, recurrence and art are what should constitute a stylistic study. For the purpose of this paper however, only the first two are relevant.

Issue of Methodology as Reinforcement
The early classical perspective of a stylistic enquiry was moralistic and prescriptive. The old classical rhetoric was not only a technique of art, but a teaching, an ethic, and a strictly regulated social practice (Barthes 1970 in 1988; 13-14). The analysis of a text therefore followed the prescription of style as the right way of putting the right thing. For our purpose, the expressions chosen by scholars from the dominant culture (i.e. Western Feminist) to describe their "other" from indigenous cultures, is observed to be at a constant both at the level of denotative as well as connotative interpretation, such that it conforms to the classical perspective of a regulated social prescriptive description of a particular group by a particular group.

The operative principle is that there is the involvement of a selection in the choice of lexis or phrase for a particular group of people, suggestive of an evaluation towards the realization of a functional purpose and effect of communication (Lucas 1955: 9).

Furthermore, Lucas (1955: 48) stresses that through the concept of style as 'the man' (dominant group, their paradigm, methodology and theory) there is the implication of the means by which one personality moves other or (from the angle of this paper) limit or control others in the process of relating.

Analysis of Some Expression
How does one begin to describe a people as information poor? Is it possible for a people with a culture and a history to lack information on who they are and what they are? Hence, we need to clarify in whose information and what information is being referred to, so as to dispel ambiguity and to restore their own respectability. Undoubtedly, the implication of "information poor' suggest backwardness, and a lack of understanding, but does not specify the direction, so as to make overt the fact that 'information poor in terms of what another group considers to be information - their information their viewpoint, their methodology. A graphic linguistic analogy is shown below:

S - theme(where S is subject)
Noun phrase(i)| information rich  people|
Noun phrase(ii)| information poor people|

In these active Noun phrases, the S- themes also perform the function of actors, who are either portrayed to be doing or not doing something. Hence, the focus of attention has been thematized in the phrase to project a qualifier that ascribes quality to a people. The word 'poor' reinforces the concept of a people deprived and lacking in something
considered essential or fundamental to qualify them the ascription of an identity of high value. Certainly, when "information rich" is juxtaposed with "information poor" there comes to life the dichotomy of two distinctly different calibre of people; one who has imbedded something of worth in abundance, and another who hasn't. The hyperbolic antithetical references -> Rich, versus poor <- is a sustainer of a divide.

The following examples to mention a few more also engender consideration along this thought processes:

S  theme (where S is subject)
Noun phrase (iii)    colored people
Noun Phrase (iv)    native people
Noun phrase (v)    tribal people
Noun phrase (vi)    other people

In agreement with Linda Smith (Smith:1991:1) when research is mentioned in many indigenous contexts, there is a stir of silence, a conjure of bad memories, a raise of smiles that is knowing and distrustful. For, it is within the paradigm of Western research that such a catalogue of words as those focused above were created, symptomatic of European imperialism and colonialism.

As an academic with an indigenous heritage, the question arises, why the Aborigines of Australia, Maoris of New Zealand, or Khasi people of north east India are called by their self - chosen name tags or identify markers, while some others are referred to as "coloured". Then again, is the collective diminishing tag of reference to us all as “natives” or “tribes” (not ethnic groups). Therein lie the evidence that words are not created in innocence of a set of political and social ideology. Hence one can project along this line of thought the identity attributes of "third world ", "under - developed" and even "indigenous". The denotative as well as connotative end points reeks of long term division and restrictions on who determines the starting point of research on issues that affect all groups as well as where to start. Invariably, the conclusions of such processes will always be rather more subjective than objective and inclusive (Hardings 1991: 268) global feminist chorister as any other’s, so that their issues will not be an ad hoc or tokenistic input in the collective struggle of women. Be it as it may, researchers from indigenous cultures still managed to impart the indigenous spirit into the IFU atmosphere in the summer of 200.

Conclusion

The challenge for Feminists from the dominant culture who propound the theories that define us all in the quest to resolve the women question, is to beware of entrenching further the divide created by patriarchy. It must be born, the fact, that in the fields of science and technology, developing worlds are tied hand and foot to the apron strings of the West.

Hountondji (1997: 1) reflects that the degree of this dependence is one we are sometimes only hazily aware. We fail to recognize that all cultures have an indigenous base, and the
fact that some still operate largely within this milieu does not relegate them to a diminished level of identity and knowledge value simply because great industrial centers create the complex criteria for global relevance and leadership participation.

Therefore, once we approach the issue from this standpoint, it becomes clear that the differences between scientific and technological work in developed world, coupled with the vast knowledge of indigenous information from developing worlds should be re-addressed not only from the qualitative, but also from the quantitative angle devoid of value comparison, which would be subjective. Indeed the degree or levels of development should be subsumed under the question of fundamental attitudes and operational modes. Only then will the validity of feminist agenda in terms of ideological inclusiveness, become a reference point for positive change within the vision of globalization, still under the leadership of patriarchal pilots. One of the areas to start then is the reinvention of linguistic labels of inclusiveness, democracy, equality and motivation.

REFERENCES


