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## Language, Power, and Gender: Insights from Nigerian Print Media

Damilola Ofoegbu<sup>1\*</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

This study investigated gender issues published between 2014 and 2016 in *The Guardian* and *Vanguard* with a view to uncovering the interactions between linguistic devices and the underlying ideologies in discourses on gender relations. The theoretical framework was a synthesis of insights from Fairclough's (1995) model of Critical Discourse Analysis and Halliday's (2004) Systemic Functional Linguistics. Out of a total 50 news reports, 14 news reports were purposively selected and subjected to linguistic and descriptive analyses. *The Guardian* and *Vanguard* constructed women as equal to men in the public arena and encouraged women not to participate in politics for selfish reasons but for a national cause. These ideological constructions in the newspapers were projected through material processes, relational processes, and lexical choices. These linguistic devices revealed that the womenfolk have always been contributing to political issues in the country. The two newspapers have similar ideological leanings on gender issues in Nigeria. They both projected the womenfolk as nation builders. There is a dynamic interaction between gender ideologies and linguistic devices in the newspaper reports on gender issues in political discourse. Awareness of this interaction is essential to understanding media reports on gender issues in Nigeria.

### INTRODUCTION

Among the people living in a country, national identity is predicated on shared elements present in their everyday life. These elements create a sense of belonging or collectivity in a nation. Gender relations, a shared element in a nation, occupy a major place in the creation of a national identity. Beginning in the 20th century, Nigeria responded positively to the clarion calls made by the United Nations to rid societies of gender based discriminations (Dickson *et al.*, 2014). In the year 2000, Nigeria adopted and passed into Law the National Policy on women guided by the Global Instrument on the Convention of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (Dickson *et al.*, 2014)

The Nigerian political space has experienced a surge in the number of women who occupy political positions in the country since the beginning of the 21st century. This has been possible because consistently women and men are seen as partners in developing and building the nation. Commenting on this, Dickson *et al.* (2014) say that the "structure which continues to produce gender-based inequalities in the society is being challenged." Despite Nigeria's efforts in articulating policies and programmes that seek to promote gender equality in the socio economic and political spheres, gender equality is yet to be fully achieved in the country. This paper is interested in showing how linguistic devices are deployed in the Nigerian print media to project the link between gender equality and nationalism.

Existing studies on gender issues have been examined from discourse analysis (Ibrahim 2015; Daniel 2011; Babatunde & Osuolale-Ajayi, 2015), semiotic (Nwaolikpe, 2014) dimensions. However, it has been discovered that

these studies have not adequately paid attention to the underlying ideologies emanating from gender issues in the Nigerian print media. Little research, on media discourse, especially the Nigerian print media, has focused on how transitivity patterns and lexicalization display gender ideologies. This gap has posed a great challenge since past studies have not been able to sufficiently isolate the gender ideologies that are prevalent in the Nigerian political space. This gap prevents effective comprehension of gender issues in the country. The study argues that a way of intervening to reduce gender discrimination is to facilitate the reader's understanding of the gender ideologies and the discourses that sustain them. It is therefore the aim of this study to examine gender inequalities in political discourse in *The Guardian* and *Vanguard* newspapers in order to reveal the underlying ideologies expressed through contextualized lexico-grammatical choices.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

There is a significant body of research on discourse and gender under Critical Discourse Analysis rubric. Among such studies is Ibrahim's (2015) which investigates the linguistic subtleties of gender representation in Nigerian English textbooks with a view to exposing their power relational implications. Focusing on the topical choice, schematic organization, system of reference and syntactic structures, the study reveals that there is an apparent gender conditioning in the passages and sentences of the textbooks that is capable of negatively affecting the vision and aspiration of female gender from childhood. Ibrahim's study is one of the closest to the present one since it adopts a CDA perspective to the representation of gender. However, his study is not specifically on

<sup>1</sup> University of Ibadan, Nigeria

\* Corresponding author's e-mail: [olarotexy911@gmail.com](mailto:olarotexy911@gmail.com)

gender ideologies. Furthermore, it is on Nigerian primary English textbooks, different from the present which is on the print media discourse.

Babatunde and Osuolale-Ajayi (2015) examine the linguistic and non-linguistic indicators of stereotypes on women in some selected telecommunication and drink advertisements in the Punch newspaper in Nigeria. Working with a randomly selected (24) twenty four adverts featuring female models, the study revealed that more negative roles than positive ones are assigned to women in the advertisements in the Punch newspaper. The study further revealed that the advertisements are active platforms of negative stereotypes of women. While the study of Babatunde and Osuolale (2015) may be said to interrogate gender relations, it does not however, concern itself with the role of discourse in the production, reproduction and contestation of the underlying ideologies in news reports focusing on gender issues in political discourse in the media. The present study seeks to fill this gap, its major concern being, as Lazar (2005) argues, to critique discourses that sustain a patriarchal social order which systematically privilege men as a social group and disadvantage, exclude and disempower women.

Daniel (2011) is an investigation of Nigerian women's linguistic and pictorial self-representation in Nigerian newspapers. Specifically, the study assesses women's empowerment level over a decade after the 1995 Beijing Conference. Using a combination of theories including van Dijk's (2008) Critical Discourse Analysis, Barthes' (1964) Semiotics of images, the Theta Theory of Chomsky's Transformational-generative Grammar (TGG) (1981) and Halliday's (2004) Systemic Functional Grammar, Daniel explores the women's central cognition in the articles' titles, interrogates the transitivity, modality and theme-rheme structure of the sentences in the texts, ascertains the women's present preoccupations, and assesses women's postural self-presentations in newspaper pictures they voluntarily submitted. The study revealed that women's agency was superficial and their verbal choices conciliatory. Daniel's study is related to the present study in at least two significant ways. First, it is CDA inspired work. Second, its source of data is also the media discourse. However, while the present study focuses on gender ideologies in political discourse in the media, Daniel's study focuses on advertisements in selected Nigerian newspapers.

From the review of related literature, gender issues have been the focus of a number of studies in Nigeria. While gender issues have not been studied in the way the present study proposes, the sources already assembled are carefully organized. The present study focuses on discourses on gender inequalities in the Nigerian print media with a view to revealing the underlying ideologies in the discourses. At this juncture, let us shift our attention to the theoretical framework of the study.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study relies solely on Nigerian newspaper reports as

its main source of data. Data were gathered from 2014 to 2016. The data consisted of news reports, feature articles and opinion columns. Fifty news reports on gender issues on political discourse were gathered and read. The newspapers were drawn from the newspaper archives of the Kenneth Dike Library of the University of Ibadan. Out of these, only 14 excerpts were purposively selected for analysis. Specifically, Vanguard and The Guardian were selected for the study. The selection was done along a broad parameter of national spread. The Guardian and Vanguard were selected mainly because they dedicate regular columns to gender issues in news and reports on politics. The two newspapers consistently demonstrated a high level of professionalism and objectivity. In addition, the two newspapers enjoy a measure of prestige among a cross section of Nigerian readership.

For our purposes in this study, a modified version of CDA has been devised which includes Fairclough's approach to CDA and Halliday's SFG. Fairclough's analyses concern tending to —a range of properties of texts which Fairclough (1995) regarded as potentially ideological. In this study, however, a set of levels and features is selected and examined. Specifically, transitivity patterns, and lexical choices are interrogated. These linguistic devices are chosen because they are well suited for a study such as the present one whose aim is to investigate the underlying ideologies that are encoded, reproduced and contested in discourses on gender issues in the newspapers. Furthermore, interpretation is a key aspect of Fairclough's model. Interpretation has been criticised for being 'critical discourse interpretations' (Widdowson 2004). Nevertheless, in this study, attention is mainly on linguistic analysis while interpretation and explanation are based on the findings of the linguistic analysis.

CDA attempts to uncover the subtle manipulation of language thereby bringing to the fore its ethical aspect (Ogungbemi, 2018; Ogungbemi, 2016; Ogungbemi & Bamgbose, 2021). In the process, the reader is provided with necessary tools to become aware of the hidden and subtle meanings in the discourse. The theory is also concerned with the issues of inequality and racism and strives to promote a democratic society. Van Dijk (1998) defines CDA as a field that is concerned with studying and analyzing written and spoken texts to reveal the discursive sources of power, dominance, inequality and bias.

Fairclough (1995) is saying that CDA aims at making transparent the connections between discourse practices, social practices, and social structures. These connections might be opaque to the layperson. In other words, Fairclough aims at a CDA that takes cognizance of the social and cultural events, the discursive practices which produced them and the dialectical relationship between them. In addition, he aims at a CDA that is aware of the role of discourse, which is itself a product of the social and discursive practices in producing and sustaining social relations of power and ideology (Ogungbemi & Okunsanya, 2016). O'Halloran (2003) also lends credence to the fact that CDA is not a mere description of language and to formal features of discourse but, rather, aims at

explaining the connections between language, society and ideology.

Weiss and Wodak (2003) opine that CDA demystifies “discourses by deciphering ideologies.” At this juncture, it is worth mentioning that ‘critical’ not only suggests detecting the negative sides of social interaction and processes and painting a black and white picture of societies. In the words of Wodak (1999), “quite to the contrary, critical means distinguishing complexity and denying easy, dichotomous explanations, and making contradictions transparent.” For our purposes in this study we have adopted Fairclough’s (1995) approach to Critical Discourse Analysis and Halliday’s (2004) Systemic Functional Grammar.

Fairclough’s framework relies heavily on Halliday’s systemic functional linguistics which attempts to analyse language based on the social functions it serves (Ogungbemi, 2024). To Fairclough (1992), language use is a social practice, since discourse is implicated in all various orientations of social practice – political, economic, and ideological - without any of them being reducible to discourse. The three dimensions identified by Fairclough are textual analysis, discursive practices, and sociocultural practices.

Textual analysis involves structuring, combining, and sequencing of propositions (Ogunsiji & Ogungbemi, 2016). Textual analysis concerns what is present and absent in the text because “every aspect of textual content is a result of choice” (Richardson, 2007). According to Fairclough (1992:78) discursive practice “involves processes of text production, distribution, and consumption, and the nature of these varies between different types of discourse according to social factors.” Discourse as a social practice has to do with the social, ideological, and hegemonic practices prevailing in society; it further concerns how these practices shape discursive practices. Fairclough believes there is a link between discourse, ideology and power. To him, ideologies are representations of aspects of the world which can be shown to contribute to establishing, maintaining and changing social relations of power, domination and exploitation (Fairclough, 2003). Aside from Critical Discourse Analysis, another theory suitable for our purposes is Halliday’s Systemic Functional Grammar. This is discussed below.

Systemic Functional Grammar emphasises the importance of language as a resource for making meaning; it also claims that meanings reside in systemic patterns of choice Halliday (1991, 2004) and Gotzsche (2009). What matters to systemic linguists when analysing texts is the linguistic choices made by interlocutors within the context of other potential choices available to the user. The present study benefits from this notion of choice since, as Simpson (2004) notes, language functions ideationally to produce preferred meanings. The present study vehemently agrees with Ogungbemi (2016) that ideology is often about what is foregrounded or backgrounded by the linguistic choices, and more specifically in the present study, the

process types made or chose over others.

According to Halliday (1985), the three kinds of meaning that are embodied in human language include (1) ideational, that is, the representation of experience; (2) interpersonal, i.e. meaning as a form of action; and (3) textual, that is, relevance to context. If this is translated to the meaning of a clause, the ideational function connotes representing ‘processes’; the interactional function connotes exchanging roles (statements, questions, offers and commands), and the textual meaning connotes constructing a message.

Within Halliday’s Systemic Functional Grammar, the ideational component of meaning opines that speakers or writers deploy lexico-grammatical features to construct patterns of experience or create their perception of the world (Litosseliti, 2002). It views language as a resource for the representation of the objects, events, states, etc, of the external world, and also those of the inner world of consciousness, thoughts, feelings and perceptions (Halliday, 1985; Abdulaziz, 1996; Simpson, 2004). This metafunction is realized through transitivity patterns discussed in the next section.

The transitivity of structure of an English clause entails selection for a process type (material, mental, behavioural, verbal, existential or relational). In other words, transitivity “construes the world of experience into a manageable set of process types” (Halliday, 1967; Sahragard & Davatgarzadeh, 2010) and codifies the actors of those processes as Actor in Material Processes, Behaver in Behavioural Processes or Sayer in Mental Processes, Sayer in Verbal Processes or Assigner in Relational Processes. The experiential centre of every clause is constituted by the main verb in the clause structure and the actor participant as it is inherent in the action denoted by the verb (Ogungbemi 2016). There are three components to take into account when analysing the transitivity structure of linguistic representations: the participants involved in the event; the actual event itself as signified by a particular type of process; and the circumstances surrounding the event.

The study of lexis involves analyzing both the denotative and connotative meanings of words (Olatuwoye & Ogungbemi, 2020; Ogungbemi, 2023). As a linguistic resource, lexis allows individuals to name and describe various aspects of their world. The way people perceive the world, in turn, influences how they represent its elements through language. Richardson (2007) opines that “words convey the imprint of society and of value judgments in particular.” No two or more expressions convey exactly the same meaning; they at least have different connotations. In light of this, Fowler (1987) argues that “vocabulary encodes ideology, systems of beliefs about the way the world is organized.” To Pisarek (1983), the analysis of words used in newspapers “allows us to reconstruct the image of the world presented by the press and the attitudes propagated by it.” The interrelation between lexis and ideology can be illustrated by this classic example “freedom fighter” vs. “terrorist” (Kress, 1983).

Van Dijk (1991) believes that lexis is a resource to displaying underlying ideologies in discourse. In his words, “lexis is never neutral: the choice of one word rather than another to express more or less the same meaning, or to denote the same referent may signal the opinions, emotions, or special position of a speaker.” Expressing the importance of lexical choices in newspaper discourse, Toolan (2001) opines that “journalists have rich inventories of overlapping descriptors to choose from as they sort out which characterisation fits their (ideologically contextualised) account of things best.” Ideology accounts for the positive representation of certain groups and the negative representation of others.

## Data Analysis

### Gender Equality and Nationalism

An overriding ideology in the Nigerian print media is the call for gender equality for national interest.

#### Excerpt 1

Education is an essential means of empowering women with the knowledge, skills and self-confidence necessary to fully participate in the development process. Sustainable development is only possible when women and men enjoy equal opportunities to reach their potentials. Education is important for everyone, but it is a critical area of empowerment for girls and women. This is not only because education is an entry point to opportunity but also because women’s educational achievements have positive ripple effects within the family and across generations. (‘Alhassan’s victory in Taraba raises hope of a female president’ The Guardian, 13 November, 2015)

#### Excerpt 2

Microfinance targets those in the most need, and generally those who do not have access to financial services. In many cases, Micro finance Institutions focus on women. For women, micro finance helped them tremendously in their empowerment. In developing countries, women are frequently confronted with a feeling of insecurity and a lack of autonomy. Financial responsibilities help them regain their self-confidence, and building a better future for their family. These are possible means that can be done to encourage and ensure female participation in politics.” (‘Alhassan’s victory in Taraba raises hope of a female president’ The Guardian, 13 November, 2015)

#### Excerpt 3

The senator said, “It is also no longer news that women are the bedrock of governance and should be allowed equal opportunities to represent the true meaning of their existence. (Oduah criticizes colleagues for killing gender equality bill, Vanguard, March 17, 2016)

#### Excerpt 4

For decades, she has championed women causes, either as an activist, gender advocate, community mobilize or as a politician. Her in-depth knowledge on women

development and gender equity issues were further manifested when she served as the National President of the National Council of Women’s Societies and recently, as the Director of Women Mobilization of the Goodluck/ Sambo Campaign Organization. (NATIONAL DEVT: Why we must invest in women, children – Women Affairs Minister, Vanguard, July 22, 2014)

#### Excerpt 5

In a recent chat, current Minister for Women Affairs and Social Development, Hajiya Zainab Maina, nevertheless lamented the cost of gender inequality and the general poor condition of women, adding that it is a major constraint to growth in the country, and stressing that investing in girls and women is an investment in Nigeria’s future development. (NATIONAL DEVT: Why we must invest in women, children – Women Affairs Minister, Vanguard, July 22, 2014)

Excerpts 1 and 2 are taken from TheGuardian on Alhassan’s victory in Taraba State governorship election. The newspaper opines that her victory as the first elected female governor in Nigeria could pave the way to a woman becoming a president in the country. It is the stand of the newspaper that women should be empowered and allowed to contribute their quotas to national development. It is noticeable across the data how nominal groups such as growth in the country, Nigeria’s future development, and sustainable development are often found collocating with women’s role, women’s contribution, women’s progress and women being educated. This gives rise to an assumption that women’s visibility and achievements in politics and other the public work arena are beneficial for the nation. Furthermore, in excerpt 1 above, the relationship between gender equality and sustainable development is foregrounded by means of the relational process; Sustainable development is only possible when women and men enjoy equal opportunities to reach their potentials. Here, TheGuardian argues that the only condition that must be fulfilled if Nigeria is ever going to enjoy sustainable development is for men and women to be given equal opportunities to achieve their potentials. While being educated and enlightened is good for both men and women, good and sound education for women will lead to increased productivity both at the home front and at the national level. The ideology that women generally takes care of the home front more than men do is projected here. However, this is seen as being beneficial for the country at large. It is argued here that a good family will translate into a good nation.

Another evidence of this national cause of liberal equality is seen in excerpt 2. It can be deduced that one of the reasons some institutions focus solely on empowering women is because they are blessings on both the national and home fronts. While women are mobilized to work for the richness of the country, the domestic work is not unburdened from their shoulders, resulting in women’s “double shift.” When women are mobilized, they earn money to take good care of their family and they also

become more encouraged to participate in politics and the governance of their society. These underlined utterances in excerpt 2- Financial responsibilities help them regain their self-confidence, and building a better future for their family. These are possible means that can be done to encourage and ensure female participation in politics to work to take care of the family and to participate in the governance of their society. Although it is a societal fact that both male and female family members have the same responsibility of doing housework and taking care of the family, women are excessively urged to do both tasks of housework and paid employment. For most Nigerian, balancing both tasks of housework and paid employment has become the benchmark they try to live up to. Society appears to be at peace with them if they are certified as good at national tasks and good at housework. The reiteration of this double-role assumption in excerpts 1 and 2 is believed to encourage women to be multi-tasked yet efficient.

Excerpt 3 is taken from Vanguard; it is attributed to Stella Oduah, a senator. She said this while commenting on the gender equality bill that some male senators antagonized in the national assembly. The excerpt represents women as integral to governance and nation building. This representation is done via the relational process that is subsumed in the noun clause, that women are the bedrock of governance. Through the use of the equative verb 'are', women are linked with nation building and not the selfish fight for equality with men. Women are given the quality 'nation builders' which is an ideological tool in that it assigns a positive reputation to the women folk in the country. It further assigns a sense of importance to the women that they are appreciated in the society. Put differently, this representation articulates the identity of women in some quarters in Nigeria, more precisely those who aspire to contribute their quotas to issues of national importance like politics. The Identified element is 'women' while the identifying element is 'the bedrock of governance'. This representation conveys the ideology that gender equality is important and foundational to the growth and development of Nigeria. Further, in excerpt 3, there is the use of the relation modality (Fairclough, 2001) with the choice of the modal auxiliary 'should', in should be allowed equal opportunities to represent the true meaning of their existence. Literally, in this context 'should' is used in auxiliary function to express obligation, propriety, or expediency towards women. According to Fairclough (2001: 105), relational modality concerns the authority of one participant (writer/speaker) to the others. In the relationship between women and the media, the former is represented as the one with less power, who has been deprived for too long but whose interest must be protected now because of the invaluable value women have in the society. 'The true value of their existence', according to Senator Stella Oduah is in reference to women being 'the bedrock of governance', governance with a commitment to nation building.

Various instances in the data explicitly show that women

are contributing towards achieving causes other than their own self-assertion. Excerpt (4) emphasizes how certain individuals have unselfishly fought for other women to be empowered so that the country can benefit from these women. A good example is that of Hajiya Zainab Maina, a one-time Minister for Women Affairs and Social Development in the country whom Vanguard reported as the Actor of the Material process, 'champion'. The transitivity structure of this excerpt has the pronoun 'she' as the Actor of the material process 'to champion' which is associated with more material actions, namely, 'to fight', and 'to speak up'. The goal of the process is 'women causes'. To champion a cause means fighting or speaking publicly in support of a person, belief, cause, etc. The verb 'champion' indicates an action for sacrifice, and 'provide', a verb which signals action of a powerful subject. They are both extended to a less powerful subject, her fellow women. In this representation, Hajiya Zainab Maina is the powerful political subject, while the Goal that benefitted from her action is 'women causes'. Through her involvement in various things as mentioned in the excerpt, (...either as an activist, gender advocate, community mobilize or as a politician), she has displayed that her efforts are not geared towards self-glory but for women to be empowered so as to give back to their society.

The choice of the passive voice, 'her in-depth knowledge on women development and gender equity issues were further manifested' in excerpt 4, is also a way of focusing on the action performed by the subject, Hajiya Zainab Maina. The Material process 'to manifest' is expressed with passive voicing, allowing the goal participant to feature in the subject position where actor participants are normally placed. By placing the original object of the verb in the subject position, Vanguard focuses on the action and not the doer of the action, thereby presenting her as someone who understands perfectly women development and issues relating to gender in the society. The adverb, 'further' that is inserted between the verb be, 'were' and the lexical verb 'manifest', presupposes that Hajiya Zainab Maina is not a stranger to fighting the cause of the womenfolk. She has been doing that for a long time before now; what she is doing now is just to consolidate what she has been doing all along. This is also a way of consolidating her position as one who is concerned about equality that will bring about benefits for the whole country.

Excerpt 5 has a material process and two relational processes. These transitivity choices project the ideology that some women are concerned about gender equality for national gain and benefit. In the first instance, we have a Material process, 'Hajiya Zainab Maina, nevertheless lamented the cost of gender inequality and the general poor condition of women'. The material process 'lament' is instigated by the external cause- 'the cost of gender inequality and the general poor condition of women'. This transitivity structure highlights the logic of cause-and-effect to show that Hajiya Zainab Maina, the Actor of the Material process 'lament' is influenced and motivated by

the stated negative issue. The ideology that is established by this representation is that there are women in Nigeria who are interested in empowering other women to contribute their quotas to national development and growth. This is not peculiar to Hajiya Zainab Maina alone. The newspaper houses also appear to project this ideology as they are taking the lead in clamouring for the empowerment of women.

Furthermore, there are two relational processes in excerpt 5 that advance gender equality as the panacea to underdevelopment in Nigeria. The first relational process is located within the noun clause, 'that it is a major constraint to growth in the country'. 'It' here stands for 'the cost of gender inequality and the general poor condition of women'. In other words, 'the cost of gender inequality and the general poor condition of women' equals 'a major constraint to growth in the country'. The concept placed in the subject position is 'it' and it is the identified participant of the relational process. The identifying element refers to the cost of gender inequality and the general poor condition of women. This representation justifies the argument that without gender equality in Nigeria, the push for the country to be developed is only an exercise in futility. The second relational process, investing in girls and women is an investment in Nigeria's future development conveys the ideology that only gender equality through quality investment in the womenfolk can guarantee development in the country. The solution to the developmental problems Nigeria has been battling with for decades is exposed through the relational process which serves the function of identifying and evaluating. Discourse reveals a hegemonic stance from the use of the relational process which is a tool of systemization by identifying and defining. The discourse gives importance to gender equality through the empowerment of girls and women, as it is the solution to the decades long developmental and infrastructural problems besetting the country.

In addition, from the data, it has also been observed that a good number of women/men are commended for their talents and successes. Commending successful women especially suggests that the socially desired type of women in contemporary Nigeria is a talented and successful one, given that politics and other facets of the society are supposedly demanding fields requiring talents and abilities. Increased participation of women in politics for national interests is emphasized in the two newspapers under study. This participation is not for their self-actualization but for a national cause. The discourse in question seems to maintain established social assumptions on women's liberation and nationalism. This ideology is projected via linguistic devices such as material and relational processes, nominal groups, and lexicalisation. Some examples from the data illustrate our points.

#### Excerpt 6

Chaired by the publisher of The Guardian Newspaper, Lady Maiden Alex-Ibru, the conference, which attracted

delegates from across Africa and beyond, also had in attendance, highly placed women in both corporate and public sectors. Notable among them are the keynote speaker Wendy Luhabe, a pioneer Social Entrepreneur and Economic Activist from South Africa; Chairman of First Bank of Nigeria, Ibukun Awosika; Chairman of GTB, Osaretin Demuren; Chairman of Access Bank, Mosun Belo-Olusoga, immediate past Minister of State, FCT, Olajumoke Akinjide; former House of Reps member, Hon Abike Dabiri; former VC, University of Benin, Prof. Grace Alele-Williams; former VC, Afe Babalola University, Prof. Sidi Osho; one time presidential candidate from Cameroon, Edith Kahbang Walla and others. ("Women in Business and Management: Stepping up, Standing out, The Guardian, 22 November, 2015)

#### Excerpt 7

It is quite soothing to know that the era of women struggling for recognition is waning in Africa, especially with the likes of Nigerian-born Elisha Attai. The founder of African Women in Leadership Organisation, AWLO, Elisha vehemently believes Africa's hope for advancement can only be achieved when its women are embraced as partners in progress. Hence, he has since 2009 devoted his life to positioning African women through his annual AWLO conference whose 2010 edition hosted in Nigeria planted the seed for Women for Change Initiative. This year's edition slated for August in Atlanta is holding in partnership with American female parliamentarians. ('Women hold the Key to Africa's growth', Vanguard, June 29, 2014)

Excerpt (6) is a report of a conference that was chaired by the publisher of The Guardian, Lady Maiden Alex-Ibru. The excerpt suggests that Nigerian women have participated in various careers in the public domain, including professions traditionally considered as more appropriate for men such as banking, education and politics. Furthermore, many of them have crashed through the 'glass ceiling', as it were, to reach the highest positions in the various organisations chosen by them. It is a firm belief among various feminists that there exists an invisible 'glass ceiling' in every organization, referring to a limit to how high a woman can be promoted. In this excerpt, women are described as very talented and successful in different works of life: business, education, and politics.

The choice of the nominal group, highly placed women in both corporate and public sectors speaks volume about how Nigerian women are rated by TheGuardian. 'Highly placed' as a compound modifier conveys the idea of occupying an important post or having a lot of influence. This constructs a positive identity for women who have battled victimization and patriarchy to get to their enviable positions. This constructs the ideology that women are not inferior to men; they are not second class citizens.

Excerpt (7), highlights and underlines the success story of a Nigerian man who is concerned about seeing women in leadership positions. The headword and the qualifier

of the nominal group, 'the founder of African Women in Leadership Organization' attests to his mission and vision about women, in a world where women are increasingly being subjugated. The noun, 'founder' refers to someone who starts an organization, institution, etc or causes something to be built. The qualifier 'of African Women in Leadership Organization' reveals the nature of the organization founded by Elisha Attai. This is a top-notch organization where women are trained for leadership roles. This says a lot about the person of Elisha Attai, who is constructed as a courageous and successful leader. He is also portrayed as someone who puts the interest of the continent (Africa) ahead of his selfish interest and that of other men. Elisha Attai is the Actor of the Material process, 'to devote' in the clause, he has since 2009 devoted his life to positioning African women through his annual AWLO conference whose 2010 edition hosted in Nigeria planted the seed for Women for Change Initiative. Looking at the goal of the material process, 'his life', one can really appreciate the enormous sacrifice this man is making to see more women attain leadership positions in the country. The ideology projected in this excerpt is that certain men are determined to see to the betterment of the womenfolk.

#### **Excerpt 8**

The feats that women have achieved today are a thing of pride in which, equality measures and education have played a great deal of role. Therefore, merit must be privileged and education must be democratised to achieve greater freedom for the womenfolk. (Women in Nigeria's leadership space, The Guardian, April 4, 2016)

#### **Excerpt 9**

THE recent proclamation of Aisha Alhassan as the winner of the 2015 governorship election in Taraba State has attracted varied reactions from across the country more so as she gets the enviable position of the first woman to be elected governor in the history of Nigeria. Although President Muhammadu Buhari last Wednesday also inaugurated her as Minister of Women Affairs, Alhassan, fondly called Mama Taraba, is most likely to resume duties at the Government House, Jalingo, seat of the Taraba State government if the Appeal Court upholds the judgment of the Taraba State Elections Petitions Tribunal. (Aisha Alhassan: An inspiration to women in politics. (Aisha Alhassan: An inspiration to women in politics, Vanguard, November 21, 2015)

There is the use of a relational process in excerpt 8. The concept placed in the subject position, in excerpt 8, is 'the feats that women have achieved today' and it is the Identified participant of the Relational process. The Identifying element is 'a thing of pride'. This representation justifies the fact that strides being made by women are truly inspiring some persons in the society. This reinforces the ideology that women are becoming more successful and breaking barriers as well as setting records in different human endeavours.

Excerpt 9 is taken from Vanguard. It is a special report celebrating the proclamation of Aisha Alhassan, the gubernatorial candidate of the All Peoples Congress as the winner of the governorship election in Taraba State, although, a court in the state later overturned her victory at the polls in favour of the Peoples Democratic Party's candidate. In excerpt 9, Aisha Alhassan is constructed as symbol of pride to the womenfolk and other Nigerians. She is the Actor of the Material process-get in the transitive structure- 'she gets the enviable position of the first woman to be elected governor in the history of Nigeria'. Looking critically at the Goal of the Material process- 'the enviable position of the first woman to be elected governor in the history of Nigeria' we see the depth of the success of this woman. She is set to be the first woman to be elected governor in Nigeria. She is going to be the first of its kind in the country. The ideology presented here is that women are catching up with the men and becoming more successful in their bid to contribute their part in the task of nation building.

#### **Women's Historical Achievements: Implication for Gender Elevation**

Further, various women in Nigeria have a tradition of heroic acts recorded in the history of the country with the images of female activists and women's campaigns during the struggle for independence. This tradition is a pride of the country and is more often than not recalled on different occasions especially in discourses on politics in the Nigerian print media. The renaissance of traditional female heroism is an ideology that is projected via material processes, highly positive attributes and nominal groups. Instances of this are presented below.

#### **Excerpt 10**

Historically, women participation in political processes in Nigeria dates back to the pre-independence era. Names as such as Mrs Janet Mokelu and Mrs Funmilayo Ransome – Kutiblasted the trail for women participation in politics in our country. However, long after them, the advocacy has not acquired as much traction as it did in the era of the pioneers. ('Change' and Nigerian women rights politics, The Guardian 14 October, 2015)

#### **Excerpt 11**

In Nigeria, the late Kudirat Abiola will similarly be remembered in the country's political history for a long time to come, for her bold advocacy and as champion of emancipation struggle against the barbaric authoritarianism of the military junta for the enthronement of democracy, especially in the June 12 political imbroglio era. This led to her premature heroic death. Furthermore, the likes of the late Professor Dora Akunyili, Oby Ezekwesili and Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala are few among women of high credibility, esteemed virtue and 'Ne plus ultra' who have demonstrated exemplary application to public good and made monumental achievements as highly respected female leaders in their

respective capacities of human endeavours. (Enhancing participation of women in leadership, *The Guardian*, 10 September, 2015)

The *Guardian* in Excerpts 10 and 11 makes allusion to certain historical and contemporary female personalities in the Nigerian society. Some of these historical personalities were involved in politics in the colonial era. They contributed their quotas to the advancement of their society. For instance, Mrs Funmilayo Ransome – Kuti was a pioneer of change in her days. She founded an organization for women in Abeokuta comprising both literate and illiterate women. Her organization came into the public consciousness when she rallied women against price controls and in 1949 led a protest against Native Authorities, especially against the Alake of Egbaland.

Noteworthy in the two excerpts is the pervasive use of the (underlined) highly positive attributes collocating with tradition and history. The most frequently found attributes include blaze the trail in (10), and bold advocacy, champion of emancipation struggle, women of high credibility and esteemed virtue in excerpt (11). The excessive use of these attributes reveals that the society, which the media represents, takes great pride in the country's history and tradition created by Nigerian women. That is the tradition of patriotism and the strong will in hardship, the tradition of heroism and bravery symbolized by the images of Mrs Janet Mokuolu, Mrs Funmilayo Ransome –Kuti, Professor Dora Akunyili, Oby Ezekwesili and Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala.

In excerpt 10, one of the transitivity structures is 'women participation in political processes in Nigeria dates back to the pre-independence era.' The material process in the above transitivity structure is signalled by the phrasal verb 'date back'. It signifies history, and durability, which denotes responsibility of the actor participant, namely, 'women participation in political processes in Nigeria'. The ideology that is established by this representation is that the womenfolk have always been contributing to political activities in the country. In fact, they are influential and very powerful politically. Further, the idiom, 'blaze the trail' constructs a positive identity for these historical figures who continue to inspire contemporary women to achieve greater heights in the public arena.

Excerpt 11 has some grammatical cues that reveal certain gender ideologies in the discourse under consideration. For instance, we have the nominal group- 'women of high credibility, esteemed virtue'. This nominal group has the structure HQ. They are both significant for our purpose here. Looking at the qualifier, 'of high credibility, esteemed virtue', we can sincerely appreciate the influence these women have politically. To be credible connotes being trustworthy; to have virtues connotes behaviour or attitudes that reflect high moral standards. These are lexical items that evaluate these women and show that they are indeed exemplary.

During the military regime too, Nigerian women were also involved in the struggle for the enthronement of democracy. One of such women was the late Kudirat Abiola. The military's annulment of the June 12, 1993

presidential election which her husband had won brought Kudirat into the pro-democracy movement. The movement was not without its costs: in 1994, Moshood Abiola was incarcerated and kept in solitary confinement for claiming his presidential mandate. Confronted with clear danger, Kudirat provided leadership in this period of general confusion — she stepped forward, convinced that the military's actions amounted to a violation of the fundamental right of Nigerians to elect their government. From the declarative mood – 'this led to her premature heroic death' in excerpt 11, *The Guardian* directs the attention of the reader(s) and the public to her determination and courage. The level of her courage is revealed by the adjective 'heroic', modifying the noun 'death'. Not even the thought that she could be killed would discourage her. She fought and agitated for democracy and the release of her husband till she was assassinated.

#### Excerpt 12

NINETEEN years after the gruesome murder of Alhaja Kudirat Abiola, wife of the acclaimed winner of the June 12, 1993 presidential election, Chief MoshoodKashimawoOlawale (MKO) Abiola, some rights activist groups have restated call on the Federal Government to immortalize her in recognition of her struggle for democracy in Nigeria. The rights groups, which comprised Campaign for Democracy (CD), Women Arise, Kudirat Initiative for Democracy (KIND), National Conscience Party (NCP), Trade Union Congress (TUC), wife of the late human rights lawyer, Gani Fawehinmi, Mrs. Ganiyat Fawehinmi; National Co-ordinator, OoduaPeoples Congress (OPC), OtunbaGani Adams, among others, said it is imperative of the government to immortalize Kudirat for the sacrifice she made for democracy to thrive in Nigeria. ("Activists urge FG to immortalize Kudirat Abiola," *The Guardian*, 05 June, 2015, p. 5)

The sacrifices made by these women of courage and valour live on in the society. Many cherish them and want to immortalize them. In excerpt 12, different rights activist groups clamour for the immortalization of Alhaja Kudirat Abiola. The clause, 'for the sacrifice she made for democracy to thrive in Nigeria' answers the question, why such clamour in the present time? Women such as Kudirat who gave everything in support of democracy are many in the country. Immortalizing her will have a positive effect on other women in contemporary times to aspire to also contribute their quotas to nation building. They can look to the past and be inspired.

#### Excerpt 13

FELA'S MOTHERLEADS CAMPAIGN AGAINST ALAKE OF EGBA LAND. The Alake of Egba land is the paramount ruler of the Egbas, comprising of Egba Alake, the Owukingdom, Oke Ona and Gbagura. Oba Oladapo Samuel Ademola II, ascended the throne of the Alake of Egba land in 1920 after the demise of Oba

Gbadebo I, on the 28th May 1920. Oba Oladapo Samuel Ademola<sup>11</sup>, was an educated Oba, with a deep sense of business acumen. His son, Justice Adetokunbo Ademola became indigenous Chief Justice of Nigeria in 1960. Oba Oladapo Samuel Ademola II, ruled for 42 years, but he was on exile for two years, between 1948 to December 1950, as a result of a protest against native authorities, especially against the Alake of Egba land, by the Women's Union, led by Mrs. Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti (the mother of Afro beat Legend, Fela Anikulapo Kuti) ably supported by Eniola Soyinka-her sister-in law and mother of the Nobel Laureate-Wole Soyinka. This organization with a membership of over 20000 women campaigned vigorously against taxes and price control. ("When Obas had to go on exile", Vanguard, March 26 2016)

The Yoruba of southwest Nigeria are known to respect traditional institutions. Traditional leaders enjoy the people's support as long as they try not to exploit the people. At a point in the history of Abeokuta, an Egba town in present day Ogun State, the womenfolk led by Mrs Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti resisted certain injustices against women in their society. Vanguard constructs Mrs Funmilayo as a strong leader who motivated other women to correct what they termed as social ills in their time. The headline that is capitalized in excerpt 13 is a Material process. 'Fela's mother' (Mrs Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti) is the Actor of the Material process, 'lead'. The verb 'to lead' suggests influence and control. She was influential and earned the respect of other women of her days. The organization she led left no stone unturned in its campaign against tyranny and injustices. By foregrounding what she did, Vanguard is appealing to traditional female heroism as a way of reminding contemporary women of the need to be active in the governance of the country. There are historical examples they can emulate as they contribute their part to national duties.

#### Excerpt 14

The Abeokuta Women's Union was a well organized and disciplined organization. The Egba women's refusal to pay abnormal tax, combined with enormous protests, organized under the guise of picnics and festivals, was a guise to beat the security of the British colonizers, who teamed up with the local lackeys, to subdue the women. At one protest, the "Oro" stick was brought out- a symbolic artifact of the secretive male cult of the Ogbonis, supposedly imbued with great powers, and the women were instructed to go home, before evil spirits overcame them. When the women shrank back in fear, Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, grabbed the stick, waved it around, that women now had the power before taking it with her, displaying it prominently in her home. This action gave her, a reputation of fearlessness and courage, which led 20,000 women to follow her to the home of Alake of Egba land (Alake Ademola). As the women protested outside the King's Palace, they sang in Yoruba; "Alake, for a long time you have used your penis as mark of authority that you are our husband, today we shall

reverse the order and use our vagina to play the role of husband". ("When Obas had to go on exile", Vanguard, March 26 2016)

Vanguard further commented on the courage displayed by historical women in pre-independence Nigeria. These women were fearless in their quest for the betterment of the society. In excerpt 14, the clauses, 'Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, grabbed the stick, waved it around, that women now had the power before taking it with her, displaying it prominently in her home', has a number of Material processes. Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti is the Actor of the Material processes, 'grab', 'wave', 'take', and 'display'. These processes reveal the level of control she had over the situation. If one considers the Goal of the processes 'the stick' that is identified as the 'Oro' stick in the excerpt, one can indeed appreciate her courage and fearlessness. In Yoruba land, women are more often than not forbidden to touch such 'a symbolic artifact of the secretive male cult of the Ogbonis'. She did not only touch it; she grabbed, waved, took and displayed it in her home. Vanguard made allusion to her courageous deeds to encourage contemporary women to come out of their shells and contribute their part to the development of the country.

#### CONCLUSION

An assessment of the The Guardian and Vanguard selected news reports on gender issues demonstrates how the political and ideological interests underlying the newspapers' reports are naturalized through linguistic constructions as presupposed sensible accounts of social reality. The two newspapers pay attention to the interests of women and reveal through transitivity patterns and other lexico-grammatical choices the gender ideologies in the Nigerian print media. As demonstrated in the analysis, through selective linguistic choices, the newspapers have deconstructed the existing power relations by offering alternative discourses in which the less powerful challenge the dominant discourses of oppression and inequality. For instance, in The Guardian and Vanguard, although there is a slant of power in favour of men, there is the alternative discourse where women are subverting male dominance and constructing for themselves a more powerful subject position. The data analysis also reveals a deep representation of women with multiple responsibilities. The home used to be the only domain where women were expected to function in times past. Notably, in contemporary Nigeria when more and more women are making their marks in politics and other public arena, these same women are still expected to be up and doing in the domestic arena. It seems that despite the changes in women's status in the public sphere, the domestic sphere is intact in terms of traditional gender roles.

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