

DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF DEROGATORY LANGUAGE USE BETWEEN GENDERS IN IGBO SOCIETY

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Abstract

This study interrogated the use of derogatory language in Igbo as a mechanism for constructing and perpetuating gender inequality within Igbo society. The study's objectives are to expose the ideological underpinnings of gendered discourse, illustrate how language serves as a tool of social control, and ultimately propose avenues for challenging entrenched gender hierarchies. The qualitative research approach was employed for gathering of data for this study. The primary data were gathered through structured interviews with Igbo native speakers while the secondary data gathered from existing Igbo literature, online sources, journals, seminars and dissertations. The research subject ten (10) Igbo proverbs to analysis drawing on Lazar's (2005) Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) to examine how lexical choices, syntactic structures, and pragmatic functions in these proverbs serve to naturalise patriarchal norms. The findings of the study underscore the role of language not merely as a reflection of social reality but as an active, constitutive force in the reproduction of gendered power relation. The study recommends that scholars should carry out further studies to deconstruct the linguistic forms of oppression, challenge normalized misogyny, and contribute to the reimagining of cultural narratives that empower rather than marginalize women. This study will also serve as a basis for gender-sensitive education, cultural reform, and advocacy aimed at achieving more equitable social discourse.

Keywords: Discourse Analysis, Derogatory Language, Language Use, Gender, Igbo.

Introduction

Language is not a neutral medium; it is a potent instrument for constructing and maintaining social hierarchies (Fairclough, 1995; Wodak, 2001; Van Dijk, 2008). In relation to this orientation, this study examines derogatory language in Igbo proverbs and explores how these culturally embedded expressions articulate and reinforce gender inequality in Igbo society. Derogatory proverbs are traditional sayings that employ disparaging language to denigrate individuals or groups to reinforce dominant social structures. In the Igbo context, these proverbs do more than convey moral lessons; they symbolise the deeply rooted patriarchal values that underpin societal norms (Obiechina, 1975; Oha, 1998). They function both as repositories of cultural memory and as active tools in the socialisation process, teaching younger generations to adhere to established gender roles. This study, therefore,

aims to uncover how derogatory language in Igbo contributes to gender inequality by reinforcing male dominance and marginalising women.

More recent studies have shifted focus towards the gendered dimensions of language use in Nigeria's public sphere. Earlier, Amadiume (1987) argued on the complexity of gender identities and illustrated how language can serve as both an instrument of oppression and avenue for resistance. Notably, while Amadiume did not focus exclusively on derogatory language, her analysis lays a critical foundation for understanding how linguistic practices can undermine female agency. Complementing this perspective, Eze (2014) conducted a critical discourse analysis of gender politics in Nigeria, demonstrating that derogatory rhetoric in public debates often reinforces patriarchal ideologies. This way, we are made to see how this study provides empirical evidence that offensive

language is not incidental but part of a broader strategy to maintain male dominance.

Historical studies by Onwuejeogwu (1981), Okpewho (2000), and Uchendu (1980) provide a rich backdrop, they do not fully explore how everyday interactions within Igbo communities deploy derogatory language to both sustain and challenge traditional gender roles. This lacuna is further compounded by the fact that studies focusing on public discourse, such as those by Eze (2014) and Uche (2015), predominantly consider urban settings and mass media, while neglecting the complexities of indigenous, everyday language use.

In response to these gaps, the present study adopts a Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) framework as put forth by Lazar (2005) to examine the complex ways in which derogatory language constructs and perpetuates gender hierarchies in Igbo society. In doing so, the study aims to offer a more integrated and culturally responsive understanding of how language functions as a tool for both oppression and potential empowerment in indigenous settings.

Conceptual Review

Language

Language is a complex and multifaceted system that not only facilitates communication but also functions as a repository of cultural and societal values. According to Saussure (1916), language is a structured system of signs and symbols, where meaning is derived through the interplay between the "signifier" (the form of a word) and the "signified" (the concept it represents). This semiotic view of language emphasizes its function as a social institution that mediates between thought and communication. Sapir (1921) further extends this perspective by asserting that language is not merely a tool for expressing ideas but also shapes how individuals perceive and interact with the world around them. In this way, language both reflects and reinforces societal structures, including the roles and expectations associated with gender.

In the context of gender studies, the role of language becomes even more critical as it mirrors and perpetuates social hierarchies and power dynamics. On this note, Cameron (1998) argues

that language is inherently political, serving as a mechanism through which gender inequality is both constructed and maintained. For example, certain linguistic practices, such as the use of gendered pronouns and titles, reinforce traditional gender roles and stereotypes. In Igbo society, where the present study is focused, language is deeply intertwined with cultural norms, and the way men and women use language often reflects broader societal expectations regarding gender roles. Mohammed (2012) asserts that "women see language as a means of communicating with people, whereas men view it as a competitive or combative tool." As Okonkwo (2009) and Ikekonwu (2005) note, linguistic patterns in Igbo society often marginalize women, reflecting a patriarchal social structure where men dominate public discourse and decision-making processes. This highlights the significance of studying language use as a means of understanding and challenging gender dynamics.

Language Use

Language use refers to the way individuals deploy linguistic resources to communicate effectively in various contexts. It is an essential element in the study of linguistics as it encompasses how language functions not only in individual interactions but also across broader social, cultural, and political landscapes. In the language of Hymes (1972), language use is not just about the formal properties of language such as grammar or phonetics but also about the social contexts in which communication occurs. This perspective emphasizes the interaction between language and society, illustrating that how individuals use language is influenced by social norms, roles, and expectations, all of which vary across different communities and speech events. This study similarly focuses on language use in specific cultural and gendered contexts, where language serves as a means to navigate and reflect societal structures.

The notion of "language use" transcends individual communication acts; it is deeply intertwined with social identities and cultural practices. That may have motivated Gee (2011) who argued that language is a tool for "building" not just utterances but also social identities,

relationships, and meanings within a cultural group. Therefore, how people use language can convey much more than mere information. For instance, different speech patterns, vocabularies, and even tones of voice can reflect one's social status, gender, ethnicity, or age. This dynamic is central to sociolinguistic studies, which examine how language varies according to social factors. The present study is particularly interested in how these social factors manifest in gendered communication within Igbo society, exploring how language use can reveal broader societal structures and norms.

Derogatory Language

Derogatory language, as a form of social expression, has always been for articulation of power and gender in Nigerian discourse. Early studies in African sociolinguistics (e.g., Adegbija 1994; Bamgbose 2000) have demonstrated that language is not a neutral medium but a dynamic tool for the construction and reinforcement of social hierarchies. Adegbija (1994), for instance, showed that language is imbued with values of superiority and inferiority, thus functioning as a means of social exclusion. Bamgbose (2000) in like manner extends this argument by illustrating how language and politics in Nigeria are intertwined with nation-building and power consolidation, with particular linguistic practices being deployed to marginalise dissent and reinforce established authority. Together, these studies underscore that derogatory language is deployed deliberately to reinforce norms of superiority.

Gender

The study of gender and sexuality has recently become a compelling area for scholars, with advancements in several sociocultural linguistic fields, including conversation analysis, critical discourse analysis, discursive psychology, and linguistic anthropology, psychology, and gender studies. The significance of gender in linguistic analysis was first noted in the early 20th century when descriptive linguists observed differences in male and female vocabularies and speech patterns in non-European languages. However, it was not until Robin Lakoff's 1975 publication *Language and Woman's Place*,

originally featured as a lead article in a 1973 issue of *Language in Society*, that the study of language and gender began to take shape as a distinct field. Research during this period, influenced by second-wave feminism, concentrated on the everyday micro-discursive practices of men and women, emphasizing hierarchical power relations and examining phenomena like turn-taking, interruptions, and topic uptake.

Thorne et al. (1983) explain that the term "gender" does not refer to grammatical gender (a system found in some languages that organizes certain word classes into contrasting categories of masculine, feminine, or neuter) but to social categories based on sex, encompassing behaviours, roles, and images that, though not biologically determined, are regarded by society as appropriate for its male and female members. Tannen (1990) introduced a "two-culture" approach to language and gender which shifted the source of gender differentiation from patriarchy to language socialization within same-sex peer groups. The models proposed by Lakoff and Tannen—referred to as the "dominance" and "difference" models, respectively—laid the foundation for contemporary work on language and gender. By the mid-1990s, the field experienced a resurgence, often called the "discursive turn" in social theory. Speech differences in interaction may reflect individuals' social networks (Holmes 1996:190). Gender, therefore, differs from sex in that sex is the biological component of male and female, while gender is socially learned and acquired.

According to Trudgil (2000), gender differentiation in language arises because language is a social phenomenon closely tied to social attitudes. Men and women are socially different in that society imposes distinct social roles on them and expects different behavioural patterns from each of them. Gender, as a dynamic concept, refers to socially constructed roles, attributes, and responsibilities related to being male or female in any society. A society's inability to foster equality leads to limitations, prejudices, stereotypes, discrimination, and rigid gender roles. Gender is the sex-role identity used to emphasize the distinctions between males and females (Adegbite,

2009). It refers to categories distinguished by biological characteristics, which also differentiate people based on their sociocultural behaviours, including speech (Holmes, 2013). Since gender is embedded in every aspect of modern society, researchers analyze spoken and written data to understand how gender is constructed in daily life and assess the role of language in creating and maintaining contemporary masculinities and femininities (Coates, 2015).

Discourse Analysis

Discourse Analysis (DA) is an interdisciplinary field that studies how language is used in real contexts to construct meaning, identities, relationships, and ideologies. It goes beyond the sentence level, focusing on language in use—both written and spoken—and its role in social life. Discourse Analysis emerged in the 1960s and 1970s as a response to the limitations of structural linguistics and formal grammar, which treated language as an abstract system. Influenced by philosophers like Michel Foucault, and sociolinguists such as Dell Hymes, DA shifted focus toward how language operates within social, cultural, and political frameworks. Major Approaches to discourse analysis include: critical discourse analysis (CDA) and feminist critical discourse analysis (FCDA) which investigates how discourse sustains social power and gendered power relations. Discourse Analysis is a vital tool for understanding how language both reflects and shapes society. It reveals hidden ideologies, challenges inequalities, and uncovers the subtle dynamics of communication across various contexts.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design, using Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) as the primary analytical framework. FCDA henceforth allows for the examination of how language specifically proverbs reproduce gendered power relations, with a focus on uncovering patriarchal ideologies embedded in cultural discourse. The primary data gathered through structured interviews with Igbo native speakers while the secondary data were gathered from existing Igbo literature, online sources, journals, seminars and dissertations. The sample

size of the interviewees was 30 persons (15 males and 15 females). Ten (10) proverbs were randomly sampled and analyzed from selected Igbo proverbs. The data were specifically collected from Ñnéwí communities, including Ótóló, Ûrúágū, Ûmūdīm, and Ñnéwíhí. The Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) was used to interpret the proverbs and accompanying narratives, focusing on: representations of women, power dynamics in gendered language, analyse how proverbs serve to maintain, challenge, or negotiate gender hierarchies in Igbo society.

Theoretical Framework

Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) is a discourse method that offers powerful lens for exploring the relationship between language and gendered power structures. This approach examines how everyday communication whether through speech, writing, or symbols can reinforce or resist societal expectations about gender. Rooted in both feminist theory and critical discourse analysis, this FCDA approach is concerned with uncovering how language not only mirrors existing gender norms and ideologies but also plays a role in maintaining and sustaining them. By analyzing discourse in this way, researchers can reveal hidden inequalities and question the assumptions that often go unchallenged in public and private conversations.

At its core, FCDA contends that discourse is not a reflection of reality but an active process that constructs social norms and power relations. Whereas traditional CDA has often focused on broader socio-political structures, FCDA centres on the gendered dimensions of discourse, foregrounding how linguistic practices serve to naturalise male dominance (Lazar, 2005). This approach is premised on the view that language is inherently political; it shapes individual subjectivities and societal structures alike. Feminist scholars such as Sunderland and Litosseliti (2002) have argued that by examining the subtle mechanisms of power within language, FCDA not only critiques existing inequalities but also opens avenues for resistance and transformation. When applied to the analysis of Igbo proverbs as used by genders which is the focus of this study, FCDA therefore provides a

comprehensive framework for exploring the multifaceted ways in which derogatory language contributes to gender inequality. This study thus adopted FCDA to critically interrogate three primary dimensions: lexical choices, syntactic

constructions and pragmatic functions. This study will contribute to the academic discourse on language and power and offer a critical tool for addressing and ultimately challenging gender inequality within Igbo cultural narratives.

Data Presentation and Analysis

In this section the study provided the analysis of ten (10) Igbo proverbs that demonstrate derogation, and by extension, inequality towards the feminine gender, and analyse the proverbs with the FCDA's theoretical foundation discussed above. Specifically, the analysis follows the operation of the FCDA namely, lexical choices, syntactic structures and pragmatic functions, with which the proverbs are structured.

i. *Nwáanyịna-adighianúrú díyaokwu, itálíka e jiéziyaihe.*

Gloss: Woman REL-be-NEG HAB-hear husband 3SG word, 2SG-be.like COMP 3SG use tell 3SG thing.

Proverbial meaning: A woman that is disobedient to her husband must be taught obedience with the cane. The metaphorical use of “cane” as an instrument of discipline not only implies physical punishment for them but symbolises the broader imposition of patriarchal control. Syntactically, the imperative structure of the proverb suggests a normative rule rather than a mere observation. For example, the conditional relationship (if a woman is disobedient, then punishment is justified) really positions male authority as an unavoidable response. This mirrors on how syntactic framing can embed power imbalances within discourse, thereby effectively rendering female defiance in Igbo society as both transgressed and in need of correction, as opposed to their male counterpart. On the pragmatic function level, practically, the proverb operates as a prescriptive tool for socialisation. In Igbo society, elders and community leaders use such maxims to instruct younger generations on the proper roles of women. Thus, it reinforces a cultural expectation of submission, which is central to the maintenance of gender hierarchies. Considering the lexical choices, the vocabulary of the language use is particularly loaded. Terms such as “disobedient” and “obedience” are not neutral; we see that they are imbued with normative expectations of female behaviour. By sanctioning corporal punishment, the proverb not only reflects existing power dynamics but actively reaffirms them in daily interactions.

ii. *Nwáanyị lèdà díya íké àkpó òyankù*

Gloss: Woman look down husband 3SG strength call 3SG dry

Proverbial meaning: When a woman despises her husband, she loses favour from him, and then suffers.

The proverb serves to control and constrain individual agency, particularly for marginalised groups. This is also reflected in the syntactic construction which is declarative and deterministic. It establishes a causal relationship that implicitly blames the woman for her misfortune, thereby perpetuating the notion that women must maintain subservience to avoid inevitable suffering. Functionally then, this proverb operates as what we can put as “a cautionary tale”. By presenting a direct cause-and-effect scenario, it instructs women on the dangers of assertiveness or resistance. It also functions as a social control mechanism, where the threat of personal loss is used to enforce conformity. In this proverb, the choice of words such as “despises” and “suffers” evokes strong negative connotations. The language suggests that any act of disdain by a woman inevitably results in personal loss and isolation. This linguistic construction is indicative of a broader ideological framework in which emotional responses are tightly regulated by gender norms. By presenting a direct cause-and-effect scenario, it instructs women on the dangers of assertiveness or resistance. It also functions as a social control mechanism, where the threat of personal loss is used to enforce conformity.

iii. *nà nzukó, ọ kamma ịnu okwu nwatakịrì nwóké kàrà ịnu okwu nwáanyị.*

Gloss: LOC meeting 3SG COMP good hear word child man more hear word woman

Proverbial meaning: In a meeting, it is preferable to heed the words of a little boy than that of a woman.

This proverb serves to control and constrain individual agency, particularly for marginalised groups. This is also reflected in the syntactic construction which is declarative and deterministic. It establishes a causal relationship that implicitly patriarchy and dominance. This mirrors the structural asymmetries where discourse is structured to legitimise existing power hierarchies. Such syntactic framing effectively reinforces a narrow understanding of gender roles that prioritises male authority and diminishes the multifaceted contributions of women. Pragmatically, this proverb reinforces social expectations that men are continuously preferred and their words more valuable than that of a woman. Here, the derogatory comparison between a little boy and a woman is stark. The proverb employs diminutive language that so belittles the woman's contributions by equating them with those of a child. In practical terms, then, the proverb serves to marginalise women in formal settings, especially in public and political spheres. It becomes a tool of exclusion, reinforcing the Igbo cultural belief that women's opinions are less informed or significant. This exclusion not only limits women's participation but also perpetuates their subordination by denying them a platform in societal decision-making processes.

iv. *Nwáanyị kàánka, ọ dika ò nwèghì égo e jilúáya.*

Gloss: Woman exceed age 3SG be as that NEG.have money REL use marry 3SG

Proverbial meaning: When a woman's strength fades, it appears she has never been useful to her husband.

The language used here itself objectifies the woman by reducing her worth to a functional commodity. The syntax thereby implies a retrospective judgment, where past usefulness is negated by present inability. This construction suggests that female value is both transient and conditional upon her adherence to utilitarian roles, as opposed to that of men. Such syntactic framing effectively reinforces a narrow understanding of gender roles that prioritises male authority and diminishes the multifaceted contributions of women. Pragmatically, this proverb reinforces social expectations that women must continuously prove their worth through service and productivity. This language use is predicated on the utilitarian valuation of women. The metaphor "strength fades" implicitly suggests that a woman's value is tied to her physical or economic utility. The language used here itself objectifies the woman by reducing her worth to a functional commodity. It functions as a subtle yet powerful reminder that a woman's value is subject to decline once she deviates from the prescribed role, thus maintaining a persistent pressure for conformity.

v. *Nwáanyị biambu, ọ zàbàogúchá. mgbe ọ nọrọ ugbòró abù, ọ zàbà ọdòli kpòkpò.*

Gloss: woman come first 3SG choose best when 3SG stay time two 3SG choose broken stool.

Proverbial meaning: The honour of a woman only lasts for a short time when she is newly married and thereafter she loses her appeal.

The proverb above shows that the dual clause structure itself establishes a clear timeline, by juxtaposing initial honour against subsequent decline. This syntactic arrangement not only naturalises the phenomenon of female devaluation over time but also implicitly justifies the diminishing of a woman's social status as an inevitable consequence of ageing. Such structuring plays into the broader discourse of gendered temporality, where women are expected to be perpetually youthful and attractive. These compound proverbs use temporal markers ("first", "short time") to delineate a woman's period of honour. The terms imply that female honour is fleeting and contingent upon early marriage, effectively reducing a woman's worth to her marital status. This transient valuation reinforces gender norms that prioritise youth and marital conformity, echoing the observations of Oha (1998) on the role of language in perpetuating superiority ideals.

vi. *anàghị etinyé olílányá nà nwátà nwáanyị.*

Gloss: NEG-HAB IMP-put celebration eye on child woman

Proverbial meaning: You do not put hope in a girl-child.

The above shows the succinct, almost aphoristic structure of the proverb, lends it an air of certainty. There is therefore no conditionality or alternative, as the statement is so absolute. This reinforces the societal

expectation that girls are inherently less capable, thereby contributing to a discourse that systematically undermines a girl-child right from childhood. In fact, the proverb plays a significant role in the socialisation process, where the early internalisation of inferiority shapes future gendered identities.

The language use above is unambiguous in its devaluation of females from an early age. First, the absence of hope connotes a complete dismissal of the girl-child's potential and value, which is a sentiment that is deeply embedded in patriarchal ideologies. By precluding such hope, it effectively limits the aspirations of young girls, by embedding gender inequality into the pattern of social expectations.

vii. *Mà nwáanyị ejíúmụ ákámà ọ jìghị, ọ gbòchì ghiya ígbu díya.*

Gloss: whether woman have children or 3SG not.have 3SG not.prevent 3SG kill husband 3SG

Proverbial meaning: A woman would kill her husband irrespective of having children with him or not

The absolute framing suggests an inherent trait in women rather than a reaction to social circumstances, thereby naturalising a negative stereotype. This syntactic certainty is a common tool in constructing gendered binaries, as Van Dijk (1998) notes, where women are positioned as inherently flawed. Functionally, this proverb works as a deterrent. It serves to warn women against transgressions by painting an extreme picture of the consequences, thereby reinforcing traditional gender roles.

This direct statement uses extreme language to portray a woman as dangerous or even destructive. We are made to see how the hyperbolic nature of the claim serves as a moral warning and a caution against female non-compliance. It serves to warn women against transgressions by painting an extreme picture of the consequences, thereby reinforcing traditional gender roles. The fear of such outcomes thus helps potentially maintain the status quo by discouraging behaviour that might upset established norms.

viii. *Ágboghò hókàrìà díya alúò ékèm mụọ.*

Gloss: girl surpass.PST husband 3SG.POSS marry.PST python spirit.

Proverbial meaning: If a lady is particular or too specific in choosing a husband, she will marry a spirit python.

The conditional structure of the proverb highlights a punitive relationship between female assertiveness and marital destiny. The syntax frames the woman's active choice as the trigger for an undesired outcome, reinforcing the idea that deviation from normative behaviour is inherently self-destructive. Lexically, the metaphor of a "spirit python" is culturally potent. Here, being 'particular' is equated with irrationality or misfortune, as if the consequence of exercising agency in marital choice is an otherworldly punishment. This language not only trivialises the act of choice but also ridicules women for asserting preferences that deviate from communal norms. Additionally, we are made to see that in everyday usage, the proverb serves to caution women against exercising too much independence in personal matters. It not only limits the scope of acceptable behaviour but also stigmatises female assertiveness.

ix. *Jí gwùn'òbà nwáanyị àzàbà òkù ihe.*

Gloss: yam rot in barn woman answer call thing.

Proverbial meaning: When the yam in the barn finishes, a woman becomes quarrelsome and insubordinate.

The proverb showed that the syntactic construction of cause and effect is particularly telling. The depletion of yams is causally linked to a woman's subsequent behaviour, thereby implying that external economic factors directly determine personal traits. This deterministic structure leaves little room for agency or resistance, reinforcing a view of women as reactive rather than proactive—a notion that underpins many patriarchal discourses (Van Dijk, 1998). Practically, too, the proverb serves as a social warning: economic scarcity, whether literal or metaphorical, is seen as a precursor to female disruption. It functions to justify the maintenance of traditional gender roles by portraying any deviation as an inevitable outcome of economic failure. Here, the use of an agricultural metaphor—"yam in the barn"—conveys economic and social utility as

central to a woman's value. The metaphor suggests that when material resources (or, symbolically, a woman's capacity to contribute economically) are exhausted, negative traits such as quarrelsomeness emerge. In this way, the proverb reinforces both economic and gender hierarchies by linking material conditions with personal morality.

x. *Nwoke nwáanyị na-egbùrúòjà n-àwù ògìgè uron òmụ*

Gloss: man woman PROG-play flute PROG-jump fence taboo PL spirit

Proverbial meaning: The young man whose praise flute is blown by a woman jumps over the mud fence of the spirits.

The complex syntactic interplay of metaphor and consequence in this proverb is designed to produce a multi-layered interpretation. The conditional phrasing equates female intervention with a cascade of social and metaphysical disruptions, thereby constructing a narrative in which female agency is both feared and delegitimised. In practice, this proverb acts as a deterrent to female participation in the public or spiritual sphere. This proverb employs vivid, culturally loaded imagery. The "praise flute" and the notion of "jumping over the mud fence of the spirits" are not merely poetic but serve as symbols of disrupted social and spiritual order.

Discussion on Findings

The analysis of the ten Igbo proverbs presented above reveals that derogatory language is complexly manifested in Igbo discourse, where it operates as both a reflection and a reinforcement of patriarchal values. The economic metaphor ties a woman's value to her productivity, while the spiritual imagery serves to delegitimise any form of female assertiveness in public or cultural domains. Both dimensions clearly highlight the multifaceted nature of gendered discourse, as the language employed reflects everyday social relations and intersects with broader cultural and metaphysical belief systems.

In synthesising the findings, it is evident that FCDA offers a robust framework by which view the complex interplay of language and power. By revealing the ways in which lexical, syntactic, and pragmatic elements conspire to reinforce patriarchal ideologies, this study contributes to our understanding of how traditional discourses are both produced and reproduced. Furthermore, the critical interrogation of these proverbs reveals potential avenues for resistance. As rightly noted by Mills (2008), the very language that oppresses can also be subverted and reinterpreted. Understanding these discursive strategies is the first step toward fostering transformative dialogue that challenges entrenched gender hierarchies. The findings also

show that FCDA offers a robust framework by which to view the complex interplay of language and power. By revealing the ways in which lexical, syntactic, and pragmatic elements conspire to reinforce patriarchal ideologies. This study contributes to our understanding of how traditional discourses are both produced and reproduced. Furthermore, the critical interrogation of these proverbs reveals potential avenues for resistance. As rightly noted by Mills (2008), the very language that oppresses can also be subverted and reinterpreted; understanding these discursive strategies is the first step toward fostering transformative dialogue that challenges entrenched gender hierarchies.

Summary and Conclusion

This study provided a FCDA-based examination of ten Igbo proverbs, demonstrating that derogatory language serves as a potent instrument for constructing and perpetuating gender inequality within Igbo society. Drawing on Lazar's (2005) Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis, the study revealed that the proverbs are crafted (through specific lexical choices, syntactic structures, and pragmatic functions) to reinforce a patriarchal order that marginalises women. Collectively, then, the findings underscore the role of language not merely as a reflection of social reality but as an active, constitutive force in the reproduction of gendered power relations. This

interrogation of Igbo proverbs therefore deepens our understanding of indigenous discursive practices and contributes to broader discussions on language, power, and resistance in African sociolinguistics.

Recommendations

Future studies on feminist critical discourse analysis of derogatory proverbs against Igbo women are essential for unloading the deeply rooted gender beliefs entrenched in traditional language. This study will help describe how

proverbs function as tools of patriarchal socialization, reinforcing stereotypes that limit women's roles and activity within Igbo society. By applying FCDA, scholars can analyse these linguistic forms of oppression, challenge normalized misogyny, and contribute to the transformation of cultural narratives that empower rather than marginalize women. Moreover, these studies will serve as a basis for gender-sensitive education, cultural reform, and advocacy aimed at achieving more equitable social discourse.

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