

The Influence of Time on Linguistic Violence in Marriage: The Igbo Language Perspective.

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Abstract: This paper sets out to investigate linguistic violence in marriage as depicted by the use of language among couples within marriage and how time has influenced this behavior in the society. The survey method of investigation is used and the data collected through structured interview. Random sampling of six couples, three from the rural area and three from city dwellers and two elderly men and two elderly women who have lived mostly in the rural area is used. The interviews are electronically recorded and the data analysis is done using inferential and descriptive methods. In the findings, nearly all the marriages experience linguistic violence though at different levels from time to time. The causes of the violence range from suspicions of infidelity, finance matters and other family responsibilities, child training, in-law related matters and so on. The violence manifests in form of use of abusive words, accusations, threats, derogatory remarks and so on. In the historical perspective, exposure, education and urbanization has increased the boldness and self confidence in women so that the violence is no longer mainly initiated from the men but also from the women. However, these factors have also constrained the spouses to make the phenomenon less of a public show.

Keywords: linguistic violence, marriage, time, Igbo land, women

Date of Submission: 04-02-2019

Date of acceptance:22-02-2019

I. INTRODUCTION:

The marriage institution is one that is obtainable in human cultures all over the world. Language use within the marriage, just as in all human relationships is inevitable. Individuals who are parties in marriage use language to achieve different goals in different situations. It could be used to express positive emotions and intents as well as negative ones. The positive ones include love, affection, trust, encouragement, joy and so on while the negative ones include distrust, suspicion, disagreement, sadness, anger, disapproval, and so on. Thus, language as a veritable tool is employed by individuals in a marriage relationship ultimately either to build it up, strengthen it or bring about its turbulence or absolute dissolution. The phenomenon of linguistic violence especially in marriage is one that is not popular among many scholars. Sometimes, the scope and impact of its effect on individuals, relationships, and societies are less appreciated yet many conflicts between individuals or groups of people hardly set in without an initial linguistic face off. Many a time, the nature, extent, and manifestations of linguistic violence are influenced by factors such as sex of the people involved, the situation, time, and age of the parties. This chapter therefore interrogates the influence of time on linguistic violence in marriage among the Igbo of South East Nigeria.

1.2 Objective: the objective of this work is to outline the features of linguistic violence as it occurs in marriage and how time, economy, and environment have influenced the phenomenon in Igbo land.

1.3 Methodology: the method used in the analysis of this work is descriptive and inferential methods of analysis. The survey method of investigation is used and structured interview was used to gather the data. Six couples each were sampled from three metropolitan cities of Enugu, Onitsha and Aba in the South East Zone, representing the Igbo heartland. Three of the couples were chosen from the cities while three were sampled from their surrounding rural areas. In addition, the variables of age, education, and exposure of the respondents were put into consideration.

II. LINGUISTIC VIOLENCE AND HUMAN RELATIONS:

Linguistics is generally defined as the scientific study of human language. It applies the scientific approach to the study of the nature of language and its function in human societies. It also involves itself more recently in studying language in relation to other related disciplines such as psychology, philosophy, medicine, criminology and others.

2.1 Violence: could be defined as the exertion of physical force so as to injure or abuse (as in warfare). It could take place anywhere people come in contact with each other; in public or private places. When it takes place in the home, it is termed domestic violence. Domestic violence could take place between husband and wife, children or other persons who live with the family. According to Arendt, (1970, 35), "violence is nothing more than the most flagrant manifestation of power." The definition gives the application of violence to many spheres of human existence other than the obvious. It also implies that it manifests itself where there is disparity in the possession of power, ability or authority between the parties involved; one lording it over the other. Thus Garver (1990, 817), developed a typology of violence that isolates overt and covert forms as well as institutional and personal forms.

Overt forms of violence are those acts of violence that are physical and directly affect the victim in a physical way. These acts could range from physical blows dealt with the fists or any other part of the body or with other objects, pushing, shoving, and so on. On the other hand, covert form of violence is perpetrated with those acts which inflict other types of injuries other than the physical. These acts could be verbal or linguistic, attitudinal, facial expressions, and the likes.

Institutional violence is the type meted to individuals or peoples as a result of the existence or the creation of a system which is inimical to their well being or existence. Again, this type may not necessarily be physical though its effect on the victim may be perceived or manifested in a physical way. In the examples given by Garver (1990, 817), linguistic violence would fall under institutional and covert forms; institutional because language is seen as an institution and covert because the impact is more psychological than physical.

Galtung (1990, 293), discusses direct, symbolic, and cultural violence. He opines that "Direct violence is an *event*; structural violence is a *process* with ups and downs; cultural violence is an *invariant*, a 'permanence' ... remaining essentially the same for long periods, given the slow transformations of basic culture." In this definition, direct violence is the type that is easily identifiable and could generate immediate reactions from the victims as well as from observers or sympathizers. It corresponds to Gaver's overt violence. Structural violence is the type that evolves over time, orchestrated by direct involvement of its architects or perpetrators. An apt example is that of the legalization of abortion in some nations of the world. It takes a long time of dwindling and rising fortunes before its eventual establishment. Cultural violence on the other hand, according to Galtung is an invariant; almost permanent. It stays in place for long periods of time; constituting a way of life of the people. In his explanation, the violence takes equally a long time to be stopped or minimized if ever. Linguistic violence particularly in marriage falls into this class.

Arendt (1970, 36), avers that there are subtle forms of linguistic violence. "In a system where a group of people is oppressed through various means to make them inferior to the rest of the people or deny them some common rights is a form of violence though perpetrated in a subtle way". She reiterates that 'the silence of many people is achieved through the system of oppression'

Stephanie Ross (1981) avers that "Words can hurt, and one way they do is by conveying denigrating or demeaning attitudes."

2.2 Marriage is defined as an act in which two people of opposite sex enter into a contractual relationship which is legally recognized. It could also be seen as the state of being united to a person of opposite sex as husband or wife in a contractual relationship recognized by law. In more recent times though, this meaning may include persons of same sex in some states where it is recognized.

2.3 Linguistic Violence: Chukwuma (2013) sees violence as a power relationship, in essence it is more about men and boys feeling that they have power and control over women and young girls... by physically and sexually assaulting them into submission. Gorsevski (1988) defines linguistic violence as an act of verbal hatred, as well as a form of physical violence. She also avers that studies on linguistic violence have concretized the fact with scientific evidence of how violent language-- hurtful words, facial grimaces, or gestures-- targets its victims in a very clear and physical way.

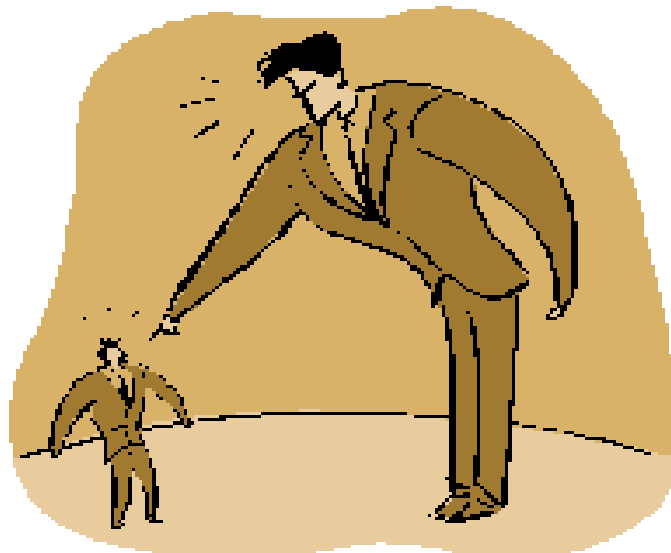


Image 1: Physical effect of linguistic violence on victims. (Gorsevski, (1998, 242)



Image 2: Effect of linguistic violence in the work place (Gorsevski, (1988, 243).

The victims of verbal hate crimes become depressed and physically weary in a manner that can be measurable and physical in outcome.

Linguistic violence in marriage has also received the attention of scholars. Just as in other situations, linguistic violence has far reaching effects on its victims which can be physically manifested. According to Gorsevski (1988, 243), it is proven scientifically that ‘negative conversations between married couples can lead to disgust, hatred, or other negative feeling resulting in bodily or physiological responses’.

The spoken word, as we can see from the foregoing, is a tool that could be used for purposes other than just to pass information or communicate. It could be a weapon which individuals use against their victims for the purpose of hurting or intimidating them. We will now look at the way this takes place in the marriage relationships among couples among the Igbo of South East Nigeria.

III. LINGUISTIC VIOLENCE IN MARRIAGE BEFORE THE ADVENT OF CHRISTIANITY IN IGBO LAND:

Traditionally, every male child is raised up with the notion that he is the superior gender and the female is inferior or at best secondary. In the words of Adetunji (2010, 10), ‘In the traditional Igbo society, the male child is preferred to the female. Moreover, a mother of solely female children is inferior to a mother of a single male child’ the male child is given the prerogative of taking part in major activities of the home such as cultivation of crops, cutting down trees, tapping palm-wine and even taking family decisions. The male is raised with an air of importance over the female who is taught to always assume a subservient position to the male

especially in expressing of opinions. On the other hand, the female child is left with other supposedly odd jobs in the home such as house cleaning, washing of clothes, fetching of water and cooking of the family meals. The female was meant to be seen and not heard. The women on their own part had no choice and in the words of Adetunji (2010, 13) “have had to adapt to or accept various forms of linguistic oppression and abuses, cumulatively underlining their “second citizen” status.” Also Gay, (1997, 247) opines that “Violence on women, especially in a patriarchal African society like Nigeria, is time worn and taken for granted, and most often, enacted by men in their relations with women”.

When they grow up into adulthood and enter into a marriage relationship, the position is even made more pronounced. The compound is laid out in a way that the outer part houses the main building, the Obi (sitting room/parlor) where the man resides. Visitors to the home are received and entertained there. It has an inner room with a bed where the man sleeps. The woman on the other hand lives in a separate part of the compound demarcated with a wall with a hut and an adjoining part that serves as the hearth. She is not expected to come to the Obi except on invitation and even then, she performs whatever role she is invited to come and perform and retires back to her hut in the inner part of the compound. The woman is thus isolated physically and linguistically. Just as Adetunji, (2010, 12) rightly points out,

Nigerian women are either silent or silenced. In most Nigerian linguistic groups, wives are not expected to speak, whenever their husbands are also part of a multiparticipant conversation (for example, family meetings). And if they would, the wives are expected to, firstly, seek their husbands’ consent, either linguistically or paralinguistically. It is only for “unserious” comments or banter that such women may be allowed the freedom to self-select their turns (to speak). As such, women lose their vocalicity in mixed-sex dialogues.

Thus, the women are denied their rights of participation in the affairs of the families to which they belong and labor all their lives to nurture and take care of their well being.

The man reserves the right to talk to the woman in any manner he deems fit and the woman on her own part is expected never to talk back. If she has any contribution or explanation, she waits till the man has finished saying what he had to say. Even then, she is expected to do so respectfully. It was assumed that it is the worst kind of woman that talks back at her husband. When a man bites his wife for talking back at him, it was more or less an acceptable norm as the wife is assumed to have invited the biting by her action.

It was the duty of the man to provide food and upkeep for his family. Any activity that the woman engages in was seen as offering support to the man to fulfill his obligation. As such, any proceeds from such engagements were owned by the man, the woman had no rights to them. It was the obligation of the man to hand out raw food especially yam to the wife daily. The duty of the wife was to prepare and serve the family with the help of her female children. Even on occasion of the man’s death, it was the man’s son that inherited his property. If the woman was unfortunate to have had no son(s), the man’s relations had the right to inherit his property. The woman therefore was under obligation to be subject to the man’s whims and caprices including linguistic violence or else she starves with her children.

Traditionally in Igbo land, some women who were exceptionally enterprising and were able to accumulate wealth either through trading or agricultural endeavors attained a level of independence, respect and prestige from the men and the society at large. They no longer looked unto their husbands for daily provisions for the family upkeep. They could afford to undertake capital projects and engage in philanthropic activities. Some were even allowed to take some traditional titles that the culture allows. They thus grew out of the usual and major means by which the men subjugate women; starving them of daily provisions and social protection. Such women hardly suffered linguistic violence from their husbands.

3.1 Influence of Time on the Fortunes of Women in Igbo land: over time due to the influence of Christianity, western education and their attendant modernization, the lot of women had since improved. The Igbo is known for his penchant for imbibing innovative ideas. This is also true when it comes to the acceptance of the Christian religion and western education. These two factors and time have changed the attitude of both men and women both as individuals and as partners in marriage contract. Invariably, the situation has also influenced the incidence of linguistic violence in marriage.

On the part of the men, their exposure to Christianity has made them change their attitude towards women to a reasonable extent in favor of the women. They now see women as fellow creations of God for whom Christ also died. The biblical teaching of loving our neighbors as ourselves has made the men realize that women also deserve some respect and should be treated with a level of dignity even in speech.

Most men today who think they are well to do would not marry an uneducated woman even when they themselves are illiterate. Some, even when they marry illiterate women help and encourage them to attain a level of western education to their own pride and envy of their fellow men because their wives are assumed to be then better positioned to get employment, earn good money and rise to enviable positions. When this happens, the

woman in question earns to herself a degree of self-worth and respect from her husband and the society at large. Surely, this influences the marriage relationship including the use of language.

In recent times, women have distinguished themselves in academics and other fields of human endeavors in Igbo land. Indeed, from the early '80s, statistical records show that female enrolment in schools in Igbo land has been higher than that of their male counterparts. This is not surprising since parents had realized that the surest way to ensure that their female children would have a comfortable and respectable life was to get educated. Consequently, many women have excelled in academics and have attained enviable positions in academics, politics, governance and civil service.

Closely related to the foregoing is the fact that inflation and the low purchasing power of the Naira in the world market had made salaries especially by government agencies less than what would sustain many families. Men feel that the rise in wages is not commensurate with the purchasing power of the Naira so, they take to business where they assume they could personally control or influence the amount of profit they could make. This has reduced the number of males in civil service and teaching in this part of the country. With the global economic meltdown in the recent past, business had slowed down and money is no longer easy to come by as before, women have become bread winners of many families today. The men are no longer in the position to control the women by means of denying them and their children provision for feeding and upkeep. This has also influenced their attitude to their wives, language attitude inclusive.

IV. EFFECT OF LINGUISTIC VIOLENCE IN MARRIAGE:

The couples who were sampled were interviewed and the outcome of the interviews is now discussed as follows:

Both the men and their wives admitted that the use of hurtful words on them by their spouses affected them negatively. They indicate that words which may not have hurt them much if spoken by others other than their spouses hurt more when it comes from their spouse and the effects become far reaching if reconciliation is delayed. The effects could be physical, psychological, or emotional.

For the men, hurtful language from their wives builds up resentment and anger in them towards their wives. They feel humiliated and inadequate. Some say that when their wives hurt them verbally, it affects their productivity in their work place as it brings about distraction, lack of concentration, stress and sometimes depression. Sometimes they try to avoid proximity with their wives making them stay away from their matrimonial homes for as long as possible.

The women who were interviewed owned up that they get hurt when their husbands use violent words against them. It brings about strain on the marriage relationship, distrust and disharmony. They resent their husbands and think of ways of getting back at them (hurting them back). It makes them reach out to friends and family members with whom to share the experience and get relief, comfort, or advice. They however disclosed that these are sometimes helpful but at other times not. Some of the times they even get negative advice that they get scared of implementing because of the anticipated undesirable results.

4.2 Circumstances that foster the occurrence of linguistic violence: in the data collected, the situations/circumstances that engender the use of violent words are varied but mostly occur when either of the couples either fail in his/her duties, feel threatened, is frustrated or fails to own up to some mistakes or errors. Both the men and women agree that linguistic violence occurs mostly when the family is undergoing one form of stress or the other. It could be financial stress, a sick child, spouse or their relation, or stress/pressure from the work place.

Child training and discipline was also identified by some of the respondents as areas of friction that occasionally degenerate to verbal abuse. There is usually disagreement on the method as well as degree of punishment and sanction on the child by the parents. Sometimes one parent accuses the other of being either too strict or lenient, indulging the child or playing the 'doting father/mother' role and spoiling the child. Occasionally when a child is wayward, parents in trying to apportion blames may use hurtful words.

Infidelity or the suspicion of it was pointed out by some of the respondents as one of the frequent areas of friction that usually engender the use of hurtful language. Traditionally, polygamy was the norm in Igbo land as a man's wealth and affluence was measured by the number of wives, children, and the size of his yam ban and other agricultural produce. Since the more the number of wives and children, the more the number of free laborers and consequently the bigger the yam ban, the men married as many wives as they could manage. In recent times however, with education, Christianity and their attendant shift in social and economic values and expectations, men rarely marry more than one wife. However, majority of Igbo men still feel that they, by tradition are permitted to have more than one woman to themselves even if they are not recognized as legitimate wives, engage in extra marital affairs. None of the sampled women could clearly and confidently exonerate their husbands of infidelity. Some stated that they consciously restrain themselves from prying into their husbands' affairs in the interest of their own peace of mind. It becomes a source of recurring friction, quarrels and strife in

most of the marriages sampled. These occasions rarely pass without some exchange of hurtful words, grimaces, and gestures.

On the part of the men, most of them could not also clearly state that their wives were innocent of infidelity. Only one man expressed strong suspicion of the wife's infidelity and that it was a source of constant quarrels and exchange of hurtful words between them.

In-law related matters were also mentioned as frequently occasioning bouts of hate language by the respondents. Many Igbo women are known to have very strong ties with their parents' families. From our earlier discussions, many Igbo families see it as an obligation to train their daughters in formal education. When they grow up and get married, the women assume it a moral responsibility to contribute to the well being of their fathers' families both financially and otherwise in appreciation of the sacrifice they made in bringing them up. Most Igbo men do not appreciate this as they feel that by the virtue of the fact that they paid their wives' bride price, whatever the wives earn belongs to the husband and his family. Even when some would allow it, they insist that their wives seek their permission before doing so. The situation sometimes gets out of hand and may generate the use of verbal violence.

The problem could also come from in-laws on either of the sides who for one reason or the other have the need to live in with the family for any appreciable period. Some of the men and women clearly stated that they would rather not have their in-laws live in with them as their presence usually generates a lot of friction which may result in the exchange of hurtful words between the spouses.

4.3 Forms of linguistic violence: this phenomenon manifests in forms of abusive words, calling of names, shouting/raising of voice unnecessarily, grimaces and gestures. Others include accusations, expressions of suspicion of infidelity, nagging, partial or total withdrawal of speech (censorship/ 'I'm not talking to you').

The violence may also be in form of name calling: 'itibolibo' (numskull), 'ashawo' (prostitute), 'ezi' (dirty pig), 'jideshow' (non performer), 'ile mgbada' (gossip) and so on. One of the female respondents lamented that the husband once asked her why she kept pestering him for monthly family up keep money "After all widows do survive". In her narration, she said she went hysterical, shouting that she was not a widow and should not be subjected to suffering as one. One of the male respondents also complained that the wife had 'a very bad mouth' and that one day that they quarreled, she asked him if 'your family tradition has surfaced again'. She was making reference to the fact that her sister sometime in the past had cerebral malaria and was having hallucinations that made her talk senselessly and incoherently. In Ozo (2017), domestic violence exists, because of the deep rooted attitudes regarding socially and culturally prescribed roles, responsibilities and trait of men and women. It is generally assumed that women are responsible for maintaining peace and harmony within the family while men are destroyers of peace.women are considered subordinate to men, which is the more reason, they think, that peace keeping and upbringing of the children is a woman's responsibility.

4.4 Effects of age of marriage on linguistic violence: generally, the older couples agree that the incidence of linguistic violence has reduced with the age of the marriage relationship.

4.5 Effect of time on linguistic violence: as we have seen from the discussions in time as a factor affects linguistic violence in marriage. This is because the society has changed over time in the spheres of cultural, social and religious leanings of its members. Most of the members of the society due to general improvement/advancement taking place in the society as a result of westernization and Christianity have improved on their financial or academic status or have moved from the rural to the urban areas there by gaining exposure. The effect of this is multifaceted.

From the data collected, the more educated and exposed the respondents are, the less frequently they engage in linguistic violence. The phenomenon could be explained by a number of factors. The exposure to western education and civilization in general gives the individual a level of self worth and dignity. Consequently, their values, attitude, habit and reaction to situations also change. In their relationships such as in a marriage therefore, they handle issues in a more civilized way, minimizing unnecessary conflict including the use of hurtful language.

In another vein, the advent of the Christian religion and western education gave women a level of independence and boldness that hitherto had eluded them. In exercising this independence, some carry it too far by being the party to initiate the use of hurtful language. Traditionally, it is the men that use hurtful language to subdue and intimidate the women to keep them subservient. Only one out of the seven male respondents indicated that the occurrence of linguistic violence in their marriage was mostly initiated by his educated wife as a defensive mechanism anytime she felt threatened or disadvantaged in an argument or issue.

Furthermore, urbanization, civilization and Christianity have also influenced the couples to keep their involvement in linguistic violence a private affair. All the respondents that reside in the urban cities indicated

that their neighbors had never intervened or mediated in their matter as a result of linguistic violence. Each of them indicated that they keep it as private as they could as it would be embarrassing to be caught in such an act. This is unlike what is obtainable in the rural area where the woman especially would invite neighbors to come and mediate in the matter. Mostly the married women meeting (Inyomdi) are invited by the woman in extreme cases to come in and mediate.

4.6 Recommendation: looking at the responses from the population sampled, the major point of conflict which usually degenerate to the use of linguistic violence is that of lose of respect and disregard to the rights to dignity of the marriage partners. If spouses would speak to each other with respect and in a dignified manner, occasions of indulgence in verbal abuse would be avoided.

Also, couples should be conscious of their moments of stress and provocation to avoid the unconscious use of abusive words on their spouses. Other causes of strife between couples should be avoided or eliminated on time before they bring about avoidable strain on the marriage relationship due to the use of abusive language.

V. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

We have looked at the influence of time on linguistic violence in marriage among the Igbo of South East, Nigeria pointing out the causes which include frustration, anger, and threat while it is manifested in forms of abusive words, accusations, expressions of suspicion of infidelity, nagging, partial or total withdrawal of speech (censorship) and the likes. We also found out that time, western education, Christianity and modernization have improved the status of women in the society as well as in marriage relationship and how this fact has reduced the incidence of linguistic violence in marriage and made it less of a public show among the Igbo. The effects of the length of the time the couple had been married to each other were also discussed and we discovered that the older the marriage, the less frequently the use of hurtful language occurs. We therefore conclude that time has reduced the use of abusive language in marriage among the Igbo.

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Interview Respondents:

1. Mr and Mrs James and Nonye Igboanusi aged 63 and 56 respectively (Rural dwellers)
2. Mr and Mrs Nwafor and Ijeoma Ifeka aged 71 and 50 respectively (Rural dwellers)
3. Ichie Oyima and Lolo Udeme Nwoye aged 68 and 61 respectively (Rural dwellers)
4. Elder and Deaconess Nduka and Theresa Nwejiaga aged 54 and 46 respectively (Urban dwellers)
5. Barr. Ralu and Mrs Obianujunwa Ubaha aged 65 and 58 respectively (Urban dwellers)
6. Sir Azuonye and Lady Chidimma Okoli aged 65 and 60 respectively (Urban dwellers)

Chinwe Obianika. "The Influence of Time on Linguistic Violence in Marriage: The Igbo Language Perspective.." *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)*. vol. 24 no. 02, 2019, pp. 37-43.