

Original Research Article

Forms of Resistance towards Sexist Language in the Ngoni Language

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Abstract: This paper discusses the study on forms of resistance towards sexist language. The study adopted an ethnographic qualitative approach, whereas the data were collected using focus group discussion and introspection to assess the data. The study areas were Peramiho B and Lundusi Village in Peramiho Ward in Songea Rural District, Ruvuma Region. The population were 10 Ngoni speakers of which 5 were men and 5 women. The participants were aged 18 and above and were involved in farming, pastoralism and business. Ngoni language is an important means of communication in the Ngoni community. However, it reflects gender in qualities through words and expressions to mention the few. This contributes to the maintenance of gender stereotypes and sexist behaviors. However, Ngoni speakers modify, avoid, challenge and reject the use of sexist language. Therefore, this study discussed forms of resistance towards sexist language in the Ngoni language. It aimed to discuss possible forms of resistance that transform, avoid and challenge sexist language. The study was later analysed using Braun and Clarke's Thematic Framework (2006) and John Gumperz's Difference Theory (1982). The data are presented using tables and explanations. The findings revealed that Ngoni speakers use non-sexist forms of pronouns, they give names of new spirit to children, they receive corrections when using sexist language, and they modify the use of occupational terms. Basing on the findings, the study recommends that language users should avoid sexist language and use non-sexist language particularly in public. Additionally, they should be given knowledge and information concerning the correct use of language.

Keywords: Ngoni Language, Resistance to Sexist Language, Sexist Language, Gender, Non-Sexist Language.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Sexist language refers to language which excludes either men or women when discussing a topic that is applicable to both sexes (Vega-Singer, 2022). On the other hand, Magnusson (2008) defines sexist language as terms and usage that exclude or discriminate against women. Ngoni native speakers sometimes resist the use of sexist language. Some scholars have shown forms of resistance to sexist language, such as Blaugers (1980), Parks & Robertson (1998), Lei (2006), and Scott (1993), to mention but a few. The use of sexist language has been observed in many languages, Ngoni inclusive.

Consequently, there have been several studies and literature on sexist language and its resistance. These include Pauwels (2001), who explored changes in the use of generic pronouns in Australian English. The study aimed to establish to what extent generic pronouns promoted through non-sexist language. The findings revealed that the use of masculine generic 'he' has

decreased substantially, mainly in favour of singular 'they'. The pronoun 'he' or 'she' does not appear to be adopted by people who speak publicly. Meanwhile, Vural, Erinc and Kucukler (2018) observed that the replacement of terms Mrs., and Miss., with Ms., has not been effective in Indian newspaper discourse. The study showed the use of the term Ms., which is non-indicative of the marital status of woman, still remains largely unknown in Indian newspaper discourse. In the same vein, Parks and Robertson (1998) analysed the arguments against non-sexist language beyond masculine generics. The results showed that a few students were resistant to change at least parts of the language. Additionally, some linguists comment that women should be given names of new spirit (Oyeka, 2017; Tan, 1990). This means children of both genders should be given names which have positive implication and meaning in the Ngoni community.

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The previous studies examined sexist and gender-biased languages. Little research has been done on forms of resistance towards sexist language in different languages. Additionally, limited attention was given to the forms of resistance used by speakers of African minority languages. This led to a need for empirical research which document specific forms of resistance used by Kingoni speakers. It aimed to investigate forms of resistance that transform, avoid and challenge sexist language. Therefore, this study focused on examining forms of resistance towards sexist language in the Ngoni language. It was an ethnographic qualitative study, which used focus group discussion in data collection and introspection to assess data. The study was analysed by using Braun and Clarke's Thematic Framework (2006) and John Gumperz's Difference Theory (1982). The permission for the data collection was obtained from The Open University of Tanzania and the participants filled consent form for their willingness to participate in the study.

2. Theoretical Framework

The study was guided by the Difference Theory of John Gumperz, which claims the existence of *differences in communication across cultures and genders*. Daniel Maltz and Ruth Borker's work (1982) on *cultural approach to male miscommunication* reviews John Gumperz's idea. They consider culture to observe how males communicate wrongly within societies. Maltz and Borker explain the differences in men's and women's language as primarily cultural and sociolinguistic differences rather than as evidence that one gender is linguistically deficient or necessarily more powerful than the other. Tannen (1990) supports that males and females belong to different subcultures and therefore speak differently. The theory presents male gender and female gender as two separate cultures, which thus communicate differently. Basing on the views that men and women use language differently by considering culture. The study explored men's and women's thoughts about various forms of the Ngoni language which resist sexist language.

3. METHODOLOGY

The data for the study were gathered in Peramiho B and Lundusi Village, in Peramiho ward, Songea Rural District, in Ruvuma Region. The data were collected through the use of focus group discussion. Introspection was also used to assess data from Ngoni women and men. The focus group discussion of Ngoni men and women discussed the forms of resistance towards sexist language. They give their views and opinions during the discussion. Focus group discussion was chosen due to its suitability in exploring the respondents' opinions, behavior, understanding, phenomena, and experiences, which were applicable in the collection of various ideas during the study. The participants of the study were 10. They were selected for suitable and in-depth data. The participants were selected by using snowball sampling. They were chosen based on

gender and age. The participants provided data in form of words, phrases, and sentences pertaining to the forms of resistance towards sexist language in the Ngoni language through audio recording. The study was analysed by using Braun and Clarke's Thematic Framework (2006) and John Gumperz's Difference Theory (1982). The data are presented using tables and explanations. The permission for the data collection was obtained from The Open University of Tanzania and the participants filled consent form for their willingness to participate in the study.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The informants gave data using focus group discussion. Data from the field were presented and discussed based on themes and sub-themes. The resulting themes were the following.

i. The Use of Non-Sexist Personal Pronouns

Table 1: Kingoni Personal Pronouns

Singular	Plural
I (<i>nene</i>)	We (<i>tenga</i>)
You (<i>veve</i>)	You (<i>nyenye</i>)
He/she/it (<i>yula</i>)	They (<i>vala</i>)

Source: Field Data, 2024

The above table showed personal pronouns; *nene* (I), *veve* (you), *yula* (he/she/it), *tenga* (we), *nyenye* (you) and *vala* (they) used in Kingoni to refer to both genders. The pronouns implied the non-sexist use of language. Although, sexist language seems to persist in the Ngoni community, personal pronouns were observed to be non-sexist. These findings contrast with those of Umera-Okeke (2012), who studied linguistic sexism in the English language in everyday discourse. He observed sexist language in personal pronouns, for instance 'he,' which is used for both sexes. On the other hand, Walandari, Purwaningsih and Hawasi (2016) identified the markers of sexist language use in the media. The data of the study were collected in Jakarta Post by using documentation. The study used library research, field research, and feminist theory as research techniques. The results of the study showed that the language used in the Jakarta Post suggested gender discrimination and inequality between one gender and another. The sexist language employed in Jakarta Post contains mostly generic words and pronouns. Therefore, the findings suggest that non-sexist pronouns should be used in languages. They neither create bias against women nor men. Non-sexist pronouns are suitable for both genders.

ii. The Use of Non-sexist Names to Female Children

Table 2: Some Non-sexist Names of Female Children

Ngoni Language	English
<i>Iweza</i>	She knows
<i>Usengwile</i>	Thanks
<i>Mayendelelo</i>	Development

Source: Field Data, 2024

Furthermore, the study found non-sexist way of naming in the Ngoni community. Ngoni speakers also name their female children the names of new spirits such *Usengwile* (Thanks). Female children are also given names with positive implication and meaning. The names suggest strength to children. These findings contrast those of Buberwa (2018), whose study assessed sexism in naming, focusing on the meaning of Haya personal names as used in the Haya community. The findings revealed that meanings of male names are associated with high worth; like strong, famous, rich, winner, fighter and helper of the family and society, while the meanings of female names are associated with low worth. Such names mean love, attraction, comfort, soothing and parents' disappointment for a baby girl. The findings suggested direct sexism in the meaning of Haya names. On the other hand, Oyeka (2017) examined sexism in male and female names in the Igbo traditional society. The results suggested that there is bias in some names given to different sexes in the Igbo society. Such names affect both sexes, but they affect men positively and women negatively. Additionally, Oyeka (2017) and Tan (1990) in their studies realised that the emancipations which exist in names can be removed away and replaced with names that reflect a new spirit of women. The results suggested that women should be given the names of a new spirit. They should not be ignored in their languages. It may help them to have positive contribution in the community.

iii. Receiving Corrections When Using Endearments Public

Table 3: Some Endearments Which Are Corrected

Ngoni Language	English
<i>Mwana</i>	Baby
<i>Madaku gavaa</i>	Big buttocks
<i>Mdumu</i>	White

Source: Field Data, 2024

On the other hand, Ngoni speakers were observed to accept correction when using endearments in publicly, particularly to women. Endearments such as *mwana* (baby) and *mdumu* (white) are mostly used publicly to women in the Ngoni community. Normally, they threat someone especially when someone is addressed publicly. It was noted that endearments can be used, but they should be used privately. Contrary, Hildebrand *et al.*, (2022) found that terms of endearment communicate, reflect and reinforce sexism toward adult women. The study applied interviews and 4 studies. These findings demonstrated the deleterious effects of

seemingly harmless language and extend knowledge about everyday sexism through language. On the other hand, Rolisa (2022) studied sexist language in English. The study used a descriptive qualitative method. The findings revealed that sexist language still exists in English textbooks. In the same vein, Scott (1993) explored on the perceptions of sexist language and its relationship to attitudes toward women and social roles. The results suggested that females tend to believe that the elimination of sexist language is a trivial matter. They discuss it and they treat it as a minor issue. Moreover, Kleinman *et al.*, (2021) examined rhetorics of resistance to the feminist critique of sexist language. The study was analysed qualitatively, using 900 comments to respond. The findings showed that commenters justified “you guys” as a non-sexist term, allowing them to continue using it without compromising their moral identities. The results indicated that sexist language is challenged to be used in communities, particularly in endearments. Basing on the findings, the current study suggests that language users should be corrected whenever they use endearments publicly.

iv. The Use of Occupational Terms to All Genders

Table 4: Some Occupational Terms Which Are Used to All Genders

Ngoni Language	English
<i>Valimu</i>	Teachers
<i>Vaganga</i>	Doctors
<i>Mainjinia</i>	Engineers
<i>Manesi</i>	Nurses
<i>Vanajeshi</i>	Soldiers

Source: Field Data, 2024

On the other hand, Ngoni speakers use occupational terms to all genders. Occupational terms like *vaganga* are said to be taken by all genders currently. Similarly, Ericsson (2008) investigated on occupational terms in ‘The Daily Aztec’ and ‘The San Diego’. The results showed that only 13 types of occupational terms were sexist out of 148 in ‘The San Diego’. Only 8 types of occupational terms were sexist out of 76 in ‘The Daily Aztec’. Most of the sexist occupational terms end in -man and -woman. The results of the studies suggested sexist and non-sexist occupational terms or job titles. Therefore, basing on the findings, this study suggests that non-sexist occupational terms should be used for both genders because they are reflected in our languages.

v. Replacement of Sexist Expressions

Table 5: Non-sexist Sayings in the Ngoni Language

Ngoni Language	English
<i>Vadala na mayendelelo</i>	Women and development
<i>Vadala viweza</i>	Women are able to do things
<i>Ngati uwapelii elimu vadala uipeli taifa</i>	If you educate women, you educate a nation

Source: Field Data, 2024

The above data showed the use of non-sexist sayings which replace sexist expressions specifically to women. The expression such as *vadala viweza* implies strength to women and they can be able to perform various activities in the Ngoni community. On the other hand, Hingston (2022) examined sexist idiomatic expressions in Sierra Leone. The study was qualitative and employed a feminist standpoint. The findings showed Krio idiomatic expressions that violate the rights and dignity of women in Sierra Leone and how are challenged. Additionally, The Difference Theory established by Gumperz (1982) and later developed by Tannen (1990) contributed on the differences in communication basing on culture and gender. Women and men should think on non-sexist expressions and use them without causing harm to anyone. The choice of words should consider culture and gender as well as respect to others.

5. CONCLUSION

The main objective of this study was to examine forms of resistance towards sexist language in the Ngoni language. The study found that forms of resistance which resist sexist language in the Ngoni language, such as the use of non-sexist pronouns, giving names of new spirit to female gender and the use of occupational terms to all genders. Basing on the findings, the study suggests that sexist language should be avoided particularly in public. Additionally, language users should be given knowledge and information about the use of non-sexist language.

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