

A Multimodal Discursive Analysis of the Communicative Elements of Sexism in Facebook Picture Uploads

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Abstract: A good number of studies in the past have examined the language of sexism from the feminist perspectives, gender segregation and degradation, etc. using semiotics resources, discourse analysis, multimodal discourse, among other theories. This study looks at sexist language as one of the choices available to language users on the Facebook social media platform by identifying the linguistic and non-linguistic elements used as a communicative vehicle of sexism on the platform. Using the multimodal theory as framework, the study examines 10 Facebook posts with texted pictures and comments. This is precipitated on the discovery that less attention is paid on the signification of the communicative elements deployed to convey sexism on the Facebook platform. From the analysis, the study finds out that Facebook users engage linguistic and non-linguistic elements symbolising sexist language on Facebook postings; that the posts on Facebook rely predominantly on both written texts and pictures, combined to make the tagging or stereotyping concrete; that the sexist posts on Facebook platforms rely heavily on hasty or intentional generalisation in order to demean the sex they chose to target through texts, pictures and the combination of texts or pictures and that there is usually an undertone of humour in most of the sexist posts, which can, in a way, undermine the fact that the posts are created to demean the opposite gender rather than for fun.

Keywords: extralinguistic features, Facebook, feminism, gender, linguistics features, multimodal analysis, semiotics, sexist language, texted pictures.

Introduction

The social media is a powerful tool of socialization which plays a vital role in the spread of information and influencing the action and perception of the people. The potency of the social media is the favourable platforms it provides for varieties of communication styles to thrive. This has contributed to its attraction of throngs of users and effectiveness in information distribution. According to Crystal (2001, p. 1), the growing number of users of the social media and the fact that it continues to play a significant role in peoples' life and relationship encourages the usage of different language forms.

Facebook, as a social networking site (SNSs), is one of the social media deployed for social networking with highly populated users all over the world. According to Rambe, (2012), Facebook is among the most trafficked social networking sites (SNSs) on the Internet. As of June 2011, Facebook is the top ranked SNS in the world (with 550 million users). The active involvement of the youth and teens in the use of Facebook and other social media in Nigeria is reaching an unprecedented height. This might be due to the fact that almost all households in the country now have access to the internet; whether through a pocket mobile data plan, or through a broadband data plan. These data plans are used in connecting to the social media.

Like every other communities in the social media, the language of the Facebook has varied linguistic and non-linguistic features used for diverse purposes. This is possible because of the availability of space, colour, pictorials, sound, emoji and other semiotics resources capable of enhancing communication. One of the peculiarities of the communicative features of Facebook platform, which is the interest of this study, is the deployment of linguistic elements in gender related constructions. Identifiable within the Facebook community, is a crop of users that engage a system of communication codification typifying sexism; a language form or action that connotes gender degradation or stereotypes. According to Nordquist (2018, p.1), 'sexist language refers to words and phrases that demean, ignore, or stereotype members of either sex or that needlessly call attention to gender. It's a form of biased language'. This implies that sexism is not particular gender specific, it is a broad-based term for description of actions, indications, etc. for both sexes.

Sexism Signification on Facebook Platform

The sexist language is one of the choices available to users on the Facebook social media. Sexist language, as a typified communication, is deployed through varied communicative strategies, manifesting both linguistic and non-linguistic features. The underlying intent of this communication strategy on Facebook is the portrayal of gender and gender related issues. Facebook users deploy semiotic elements such as signs, images, wordings, emoji, etc. as communicative modesto post sexist messages on

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Facebook. The preoccupation of semiotics as a field of study, according to Mahmud, (2017, p. 7), is the relationship of signs as symbols to meaning, that is, sign systems are involved in the construction of meaning. The linguistic and non-linguistic elements such as words, images, sound, indication of action, etc. deployed as vehicles of communication in these Facebook postings which are representational and through which meaning is inferred are such that are capable of being invested with meanings, thus making them signs, representational of sexism. Halliday's (1978) social semiotics started the voyage into investigating semiotic resources through their semiotic modes or semiotic resources taken from multimedia outlets such as images, films and videos, frames and layout, typography, pictorial designs. The preoccupation of multimodality is how semiotic resources in communication help to construe 'additional' meaning relevant to the analyst. Also, multimodal discourse analysis provides more resources from which language analysts can obtain and convey effectively, additional semantics through examination of colours, shapes, sizes, etc. of the semiotic modes. This model of the theory has been broadened and amazingly adapted to a wide range of studies by Van Leeuwen (1999). According to him, social semiotics is concerned with "the way people use semiotic resources both to produce communicative artefacts and to interpret them ... in the context of specific social situations and practices" Van Leeuwen, (1999, p. 1). The linguistic and non-linguistic communicative elements in Facebook postings are semiotics resources, deployed with specific social construct. Semiotic resource in multimodal social semiotics is an important one as it helps to associate meaning in social construct. According to Van Leeuwen (1999, p. 3) "it originated in the work of Halliday who argued that the grammar of a language is not a code, not a set of rules for producing correct sentences, but a resource for making meanings". Facebook postings exemplifies the combination of linguistic elements and pictorials, images, visuals, colour, etc. as textual construct to relate experience and engage in social and interpersonal communication among its users. In line with this, Halliday identifies three types of meaning potential, which he calls the metafunctions of language: (a) experiential meaning for constructing experience; (b) interpersonal meaning for enacting social relations; and (c) textual meaning for organising the message. Facebook as a social platform has the advantage of graphical and visual designs, which are multimodal semiotics modes. The combination of images and linguistic elements in multimodal modes complement effectively as meaning carriers and representation of intentions, ideas, concepts, thereby, creating image/viewer relationship. Lauween, (1999, p.172) again, notes that the interpersonal meta function concerns is the "complex set of relations that can exist between images and their viewers" The increased use of the Facebook as a social media, therefore, necessitates a study as this, which is to find out the extent of the use, and the peculiarities of the language of sexist on Facebook platform. An investigation into the features of the language peculiarities of sexism on Facebook will further provide grounds for understanding sexism as a concept, the underlining principles and undercurrent of sexist communication and its contributions to gender constructions. Since the focus of this paper is the examination of the sexist language used on the Facebook platform with emphasis on picture uploads and how they communicate and form meaning, the semiotics resources - actions and artefacts in the language of some Facebook pictures uploads will be identified, captured in screenshots and analysed as communicative elements of sexist language on Facebook platform. The intention is not exclusively on the language form that demeans the female gender, but the identification of the sexist communication codification on gender as generic form for both sexes. Therefore, this study looks beyond the confirmation of the existence of sexism on Facebook platform, the examination of sexism using gender perspective, and the effects of sexism as a communication specie. The preoccupation of the study is the examination of the communication elements (the linguistic and extra linguistic elements) of some Facebook postings as semiotics resources, signification of sexism as exemplified in the way and manner both genders (male and female) are portrayed in sexist Facebook posts.

Objectives of the Study

The following objectives will guide this study in other to provide an in-depth examination of the semiotic resources of the language of sexist on Facebook platform.

1. Identify uploads signifying sexist language in the Facebook platform
2. Identify extend of the use of non-linguistic elements for sexist communication on Facebook platform.
3. Examine the use of multimodal designs strategies as semiotics resources in the language of sexism on Facebook platform
4. Analyse the semiotics signification of sexism language in Facebook uploads

Theoretical Framework

The study engages the multimodality or multimodal discourse analysis in the examination and analysis of the semiotics resources signifying sexism language in Facebook posting. Multimodal analysis is a theoretical framework within the framework of social semiotics which deals with communication in and across a range of wide semiotic resources or modes such as verbal, visual, aural, pictures, among other multimedia objects. Multimodality provides a suitable methodology for analysing and examining films, animations, visual images, 'texted-pictures', layouts, newspaper cartoons and sketches, television advertisements, logos, video games, and other kinds of new structures and processes which cannot be well analysed by the available linguistic templates. Multimodality becomes adaptable in this current study because the collated data are images and 'texted-pictures'. Basically, there are very few image-analysing theories in linguistics, which necessitates the use of multimodality in this study, as the bulk of the data collected are 'texted-pictures' downloaded online through Facebook, a social medium for communication in which users

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share pictures of themselves, or those close to them with their friends online. These images are usually crested with words, hence the derivative, 'texted-pictures'.

Review of Some Related Studies

Many sexist language researchers have made attempts, trying to find the rationale behind the use of generic terms to describe people, "he" and "mankind"; hierarchic expressions "man and wife"; and belittling references to women as girls. (Doyle, 1998; Hegarty, Watson, Fletcher, & McQueen, 2011; Kitto, 2011; Parks & Robertson, 2004). From the feminist perspectives, many researchers have argued that this reflects gender bias in society and the women's exclusion from important social roles (cf Stahlberg, Braun, Irmen, & Sczesny, 2007). A growing body of research proves this point to be right. When one hears masculine generic language, one mainly sees pronoun referents as being male (Gygax, Gabriel, Sarrasin, Oakhill, & Garnham, 2008; Hamilton, 1988; Moulton, Robinson, & Elias, 1978). Other research suggests that sexist language perpetuates male privilege (Kleinman, 2002), influences children's gender schemas (Hyde, 1984), limits the perception of vocational choices for women (Briere & Lanktree, 1983), influences perceptions of status and competence (Merkel, Maass, & Frommelt, 2010), and even makes women feel ostracized (Stout & Dasgupta, 2011). Although sexist language could also be used to diminish, trivialize or exclude men, it is women who predominantly bear the brunt of its effects (Briere & Lanktree, 1983; Hamilton, 1988).

In another study, Pérez-Sabater (2014) studies the sexist language in EFL textbooks in Spain. He presents the results of a discourse analysis that examined the discourse practices of some of the most representative EFL textbooks published in the last decades in Spain. The analysis shows that women were sub-represented in the textbooks published in the last decades of the 20th century. On the contrary, a very different situation occurs in the materials of the corpus calibrated to The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages since they reveal a balanced representation of sexes¹, favouring, in some cases, a positive discrimination approach towards women.

Justification of the Study

It is noted that, even though, there are quite a number of scholarly works on sexism, the preoccupation of many researchers, as shown in the literature review above, is on the socio-cultural perspective to sexism, examining sexist language as a vehicle through which the female gender is being subjugated, subsumed identity, etc. It is, however, noted that there has been little or no interest in the analysis of the communicative peculiarities of the linguistic and extra linguistic elements deployed in conveying the message of sexism on Facebook platform. This study, therefore, looks beyond the confirmation of the existence of sexism in Facebook platform, the examination of sexism using gender perspective, and the implication of sexism in the socio-political and socio-economic sphere. The preoccupation of the study is the identification and analysis of the communication elements (the linguistic and extra linguistic elements) of the Facebook posts, as signification of sexism as exemplified in the way and manner both genders (male and female) are portrayed in sexist Facebook posts.

Methodology

Using a random sampling technique, the study selected 10 'texted pictures' depicting the sexism communication from posts on Facebook platform. These identified sexist posts, used as sampled data for this study, were screen captured from the Facebook platform and numbered 1 - 10 for easy identification. The study also engaged the descriptive research design, which enables the collection of information without changing the environment (not manipulating the data), to examine the 'texted-pictures' used as sampled data. These sampled data were given in-depth analysis to reveal their usually hidden and laughed-about sexist messages. The analysis of data was considered by determining the existence of sexist communication on Facebook platform, examining the meaning making elements in sexist languages posts on Facebook and the examination and analysis of the semiotics resources of the Facebook the selected sexist uploads using multimodal discourse analysis approach. Each of the posts and their accompanying comments (where applicable) were examined on the basis of their functions and actions in the social and linguistic contexts in which they were used. The population of this study includes all gender-sensitive pictures uploaded on Facebook by its users. The worthiness of the population is re-echoed in the fact that Facebook, as a social media, is now widely accepted and used by Nigerians and by the world's general population, at a very increased rate.

The Analysis of the Semiotics Signification of Sexism language in Facebook Uploads

The selected posts, signification of the language in sexist posts on Facebook platform used for this study are screen shot and used as texted pictures below for easy analysis.

Post 1

Boy : Daddy I want to marry,
 Dad : First say sorry.
 Boy : For what?
 Dad : Say sorry,
 Boy : But for what? What I have done?
 Dad : You first say sorry,
 Boy : But ... What's my fault?
 Dad : You first say sorry,
 Boy : But why???
 Dad : You first say sorry,
 Boy : Please, at least tell me a reason!
 Dad : You first say sorry,
 Boy : Ok Dad ... I am sorry !!
 Dad : Now you are ready. Your training is complete.
 When you learn to say sorry without any reason, you
 can marry! 🍷👍

The post above is a conversation between a son who wishes to get married and his father. The father insists on the son saying the word 'sorry' without having any reason to do so. The boy is confused and wishes to know why he has to say 'sorry' but he eventually yields to the father's demand by saying 'sorry' after which the father says his son (the boy) is ready for marriage. Though the post does not refer to women in the text, there is, however, an implied meaning linking women and irrationality, which makes the post sexist. The boy has to be ready to say sorry (to a woman) without no cause. Here, a woman who the boy would get married to would demand that the boy says sorry countless times even if there is no reason to do so. The content of this post implies that women are not logical in their thinking as they just want men to keep apologising and it makes them happy.

Post 2



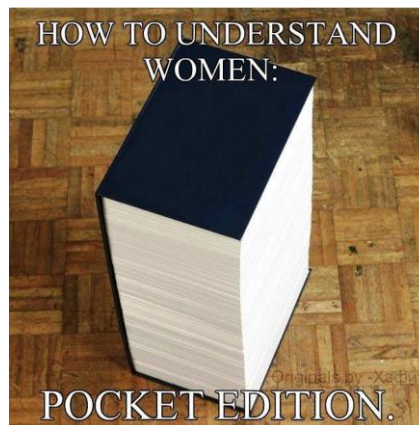
In post 2, we see a comparison of men to local rice (mostly local Nigerian rice that is not well refined hence, it contains stones and pebbles from the farm from which they were harvested) that has a lot of stones in them. The sexist language here is directed at men. Men are portrayed as not perfect and cheats in their various homes. No matter the level of care and caution a lady takes, the man is predictive. He would turn out bad as expected. This can also imply that men are not well refined just like the local rice. The post relies on a comparison of two objects (men and the local rice) which are familiar to their friends and audience in order to drive the message. There is a sense of generalisation attached to this post and the previous one we looked at. This is however justified on the basis of the fact that sexist language works with stereotypes and stereotypes rely on generalisations.

Post 3



The sexist language here demeans men as lacking morals. In the past above, men can go after married women without caring about the consequences. So, men are chronic adulterers. The sexism does not stop there. Men are also portrayed as stingy, cunning and exploitative. They are ready to sleep with a lady but they are not ready for the expenses or responsibilities that come with it. In terms of reaction, the post contains a picture of two ladies laughing at the statement which further derides the man as a laughing stock amongst the female group since their perceived nature has been found out.

Post 4



The post above portrays women as very complex entities that can never be understood. The big book in the picture is just the pocket edition of how to understand women. If the pocket edition could be this big, what will the big edition be like? The pocket edition cannot be easily read and understood due to the large number of pages. That is how a lady can never be understood. This kind of make it problematic for the men and the society at large because they do not know who the woman is. The semiotic resource of the big book in the picture and the text attached help in advancing the communicativeness of the sexist language.

Post 5



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Post 5 has no written words but a picture of a lady whose mouth is covered with a man's hand. This is sexist because it portrays the men as silencing the women. Women are not allowed to speak up in their homes and in the society. The eyes of the lady are wide open but the mouth is closed. Women can only see but they cannot talk or speak up on the issues which they have seen. The women would have loved to speak but the men would not allow them. The men use violence as a tool in keeping the women quiet.

Post 6

"Women don't read!"



The post above contains a picture of a man holding a book and a lady at her back (possibly his wife) staring at the book from a distance with a written text: 'women don't read.' They only stare at the book when their husbands or the male folks are reading and then wait for the men to tell them what is in the book. This shows that women are not intellectuals. They are lazy and they are not ready to learn new things. This is aimed at demeaning the female folk which is the aim of sexist language. This is very similar to the two posts below:

Post 7 & 8



A beautiful woman is a beautiful trouble.
(Jamaican proverb)



**A woman has long hair
but short brain.**

(Estonian Proverb)

In post 7 and 8, the beauty of women is focused on against their intellectual content. In post 7, the beauty of a woman is a precursor to more trouble. The post contains a blurred line connecting the sexual organ of the female which more or less highlights the fact that everything about women ends in the sex. Nothing of substance can be ascribed to the brain. In post 8, the hair of the lady is appreciated but contrasted with the short brain. A short brain cannot retain or remember much. Women are beautiful but when it comes to intellect, you cannot count on them.

Post 9

**When a man needs something from a woman,
he's the most humble being on earth! Guess
what he's begging for???**



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Post 9 above tags men as deceitful both in the written text and the picture itself. Men only beg and stay humble when they need sex from their female partners. Once they get it, they go back to their proud selves. The picture shows a man kneeling down to beg a lady. The lady however rejects the advances with a wave of hands. She does this because she believes men can never be humble except there is something sinister about it. In all, the post says men are cunning.

Post 10



Post 10 continues the sexist derision of men as deceitful and cunning with a picture of a man eating at a wedding party while a lady (maybe his girlfriend) looking at him suspiciously. The lady lets out her anger on the man as he likes eating at parties but would never organise one for himself to get married. So, one can say from the above that men are exploitative and they do it intentionally against the female folk.

Discussion

The Sexist Language on the Facebook Platform

From the data collected for this study, it is discovered that the Facebook, as a social media platform, has a great number of users whose posts can be categorised as sexist posts. It is noted that sexist post is common in Facebook platform because it is a platform that allows for chain of social engagements through platform communication thread involving quite a number of people. This study identified so many of such communication threads classified as sexist language and ten of such identified communication thread, screen captured, are used as data in this study, to examine the communicative features of the language of sexism on the Facebook platform.

The Non-Linguistic Elements of Sexist Communication on Facebook Platform

From the 10 selected Facebook postings used as data for this study, it is discovered that users of Facebook platform deployed the combination of linguistic and non-linguistic (textual and pictorial) elements in their posts. The non-linguistic elements are mostly used, as shown in the sampled posts, with linguistic elements as compliments. Out of the 10 selected posts, 9 of them, posts 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10 were deployed for communication on Facebook using the combination of textual and pictorials. Only post 5 was deployed using pictorials solely for communication. It is noted that even though, post 1 is categorised as textual/pictorial, the content of the post was textual based with just an emoji (*like sign*), which gives the post a textual/pictorial status.

Also, it is discovered that the non-linguistic elements identified in the posts include pictorials, facial expressions, emoji, and dramatisation. The pictorial occurs 9 times in posts 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10, facial expression occurs two times in posts 2 and 5, emoji occurs twice in posts 1 and 2 while dramatisation, occurs four times in posts 3, 6, 9 and 10. The above shows that non-linguistic elements are generously used in Facebook postings as graphic representation of the ideas communicated on Facebook platform. The categorisation of the 10 posts according to the identified non-linguistic features identified in the Facebook postings used as samples in this study shows that users of Facebook engage, mostly, the use of non-linguistic elements for sexist communication on Facebook platform

The Use of Multimodal Designs Strategies as Semiotics Resources in Sexism Communication on Facebook Platform

Facebook is one of the social media where visualising technology is greatly explored. The explosion of imaging and visualising technology makes everyday life a 'visual culture'. Lister and Wells (2001, p. 62). As a social media, Facebook has the advantage of the availability of space, visuals, motion pictures, video, colour, graphology, pictorials, etc. for its users to communicate and interact. Social semiotics rely on multimodal modes as signs and symbols signifying communicative intention in a text. The vehicle of communication and meaning making in the selected Facebook postings used as data for this study are mainly images, visuals and other multimodal modes, complemented by linguistic modes. These different modes, all combine to give meaning.

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Mahmud (2017, p.45-46) notices that there is a very interesting relationship between linguistic and visual elements when combined in communication process. The meaning generated by each of the mode engaged in communicating sexist language on Facebook jointly provide meaning. Kress, et al (2001), thus say that meaning is made in all modes separately, and at the same time, that meaning is an effect of all modes acting jointly. Lim (2011, p. 17) notes that there is increase interest in multimodality as a result of the rapid development in interactive digital media, accentuating the multimodal nature of meaning making. It is discovered that users of Facebook has effectively deployed multimodal design strategies as semiotics resources of the language of sexism on Facebook platform. These visual elements are multimodal designs through which meaning are associated and derived. Jewitt and Oyama (2001, p. 134) note that social semiotics of visual communication involves the description of semiotic resources, what can be said and done with images (and other visual means of communicating and how the things people say and do with images can be interpreted. Sexist language on Facebook platform is a text with gamut of communication peculiarities that give room for human interaction and expression of idea on gender specifications and notions. According to Stivers and Sidnell (2005, p. 1), human social interaction is a product of the intertwined co-operation of different modalities. Social interactions on Facebook as a platform where human interaction is profoundly active, therefore, allows dynamism in the communicative elements engaged in message production and their meaning construct grounded on the social and situational context in which its posts could be subjected. This is so, as the communicative elements engaged, such as signs are not limited to associative meaning but meaning could be derived from cultural context in which they are situated. Mahmud (2017). The Facebook provides platform for users to generate discussion thread using multimodal modes that are “integrated to form a composite whole” of idea. These multimodal semiotics resources, signification of sexism, are identified in some of the posts on Facebook platform and are selected for analysis in this study.

Findings and Conclusion

From our analysis above, we see that sexist posts rely heavily on hasty or intentional generalisation in order to demean the sex they chose to target. The posts in most cases usually carries the word men or women as against some men or some women or any other limiter adjectives that can help streamline the focus in the gender. The sexist posts examined usually rely on both written texts and pictures. They both combine to make the tagging or stereotyping concrete though there are some with only texts or pictures. However, a majority of the data shows the use of both. There is usually an undertone of humour in most of the sexist posts which can in a way undermine the fact that the posts are created for fun as against demeaning the opposite gender. We would need to state however that jokes and what constitute humour is part of the identity and social construction of an individual. So, when a joke is made out of a sexist language, the tendency that it is part of the belief system is quite high. This study presented a multimodal analysis of 10 Facebook posts with the intention of unravelling the sexist language or undertone of the posts. The study applied the multimodal theory as the framework for analysis. At the end, the study reveals amongst others that sexist posts are built around intentional generalisations which help to put the gender being focused on in a tight group.

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