

# NINE

## Effects of Gender on Language Use in Yoruba Indigenous Advertising

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### **Abstract**

*Indigenous advertising in Africa in general, and in Yoruba society in particular has been around from time immemorial. Indigenous advertising attaches great worth to human relations in that the sellers believe that they should be able to earn the trust of a potential buyer by mere talking about the products through some dexterity in the act of advertising. The focus of this paper is to examine the role of gender in the use of language of the Yoruba indigenous advertising. This is to clarify the involvement of the male and female gender in carrying out the act of indigenous advertising among the Yoruba people in Lagos, Nigeria. Open markets and non-designated market areas in Lagos were visited to collect advertising data, out of which advertising with gender contents were selected for analysis. The social role theory is employed to give a theoretical outlook to the role of gender in Yoruba indigenous advertising. The analysis shows that the female gender is more susceptible to indigenous advertising through the use of language. This corroborates the assertions of various gender scholars that females are better language users than males.*

**Key Words:** *Indigenous Advertising, Language-Use, Open Market, Gender, Social Role*

### **Résumé**

*La publicité autochtone en Afrique en général, et dans la société yoruba*

*en particulier, existe depuis des temps immémoriaux. La publicité autochtone attache une grande valeur aux relations humaines dans la mesure où les vendeurs pensent qu'ils devraient pouvoir gagner la confiance d'un acheteur potentiel en parlant simplement des produits grâce à une certaine dextérité dans l'acte de publicité. L'objectif de cet article est d'examiner le rôle du genre dans l'utilisation du langage de la publicité indigène yoruba. Il s'agit de clarifier l'implication du sexe masculin et féminin dans la réalisation de l'acte de publicité autochtone parmi les Yoruba à Lagos, au Nigeria. Les marchés ouverts et les zones de marché non désignées de Lagos ont été visités pour collecter des données publicitaires, parmi lesquelles des publicités à contenu de genre ont été sélectionnées pour l'analyse. La théorie du rôle social est utilisée pour donner une perspective théorique au rôle du genre dans la publicité indigène yoruba. L'analyse montre que le sexe féminin est plus sensible à la publicité indigène grâce à l'utilisation de la langue. Cela corrobore les affirmations de divers spécialistes du genre selon lesquelles les femmes sont de meilleurs utilisateurs de la langue que les hommes.*

**Mots clés:** *publicité autochtone, utilisation de la langue, marché libre, genre, rôle social*

## **Introduction**

Language and gender issue in African scholarship is not a new adventure. There have been series of researches that have queried this topic on different frontiers. (Oloruntoba-Oju, 2009; Goffman 1977). However, there is need to further consider the platforms through which the role of gender could be displayed and analysed through language-use. The relationship between language, gender and indigenous advertising, and indeed, Yoruba indigenous advertising can be said to be presumptive. This is because a critical evaluation of indigenous advertng would show that gender and the **use of language both play important roles in the actualization and dissemination of**

information about certain products (Talbot, 2010; Rojas-Primus, 2012). In this paper, I attempt to analyse the role of gender in the indigenous advertising of the Yoruba people with the use of Yoruba as a language of engagement. The focus of this study is to examine gender role in Yoruba indigenous advertising through language.

Advertising among the Yoruba people is not a new development. It has been around since time immemorial. Yoruba indigenous people are productive and very resourceful with diverse entrepreneurial abilities. By advertising here, I mean the indigenous advert that are still in use in the hinterland of the Yoruba society. They knew that it was not enough to produce items and services but that efforts need to be put into how the products and services are to be marketed. As such, calls are made to people who might want to have those products.

The peculiarities associated with the process and formats of calling out to intending buyers are what depict advertising among the Yoruba. Although, advertising has taken new forms to meet up with the present realities, it is important to note that there still exists the indigenous format of advertising products in the big cities and of course in the hinterland where this practice is still very potent.

To further establish that advertising plays a very significant role in sales and services among the indigenous Yoruba people, there are sayings that corroborate this claim. One of such is: *Ipólówó jà ni àgúnmu òwò*, this could be translated as 'advertising is what keeps business going'. Therefore, the Yoruba people do not take the issue of advertising lightly. These advertising could take different forms, just so for the people to be convinced to patronize the sellers. Some of the patterns of advertising include call, plea, description, exaggeration, etc. What this paper examines is the role of gender in all of these. Basically, which gender is mostly involved in the whole process and

why is this so? There might be various reasons why a particular gender is comfortable at the centre of Yoruba indigenous advertising, however, in this paper, I have decided to explore language as a tool that makes indigenous advertising easy for a particular gender than it is for other gender. What role does gender play in the successful process of advertising, in relation to language use among the Yoruba people of Nigeria? Firstly, it is important that I introduce the Yoruba people and their language.

Yorùbá language is spoken, mainly in the South-Western part of Nigeria, South-Eastern part of Benin-Republic and in the North-Eastern part of Togo. The language is also used for diverse purposes including religious and trade in the Caribbean. In all, Yorùbá speakers constitute a sizeable number of the population in West Africa. It has been established that the Yorùbá is the third most spoken African indigenous language in Africa after Swahili and Hausa, and the second most spoken African indigenous language in West Africa (Lodhi, 1993; Sands and Gunnink, 2019). The availability of various oral genres in Yorùbá language is an indication that the language is ancient with deep and robust stylistic features that endear the hearers of the language to the speakers.

The Yoruba language has been presented by scholars, both indigenous and foreign, to be a profoundly poetic language. There are various poetic genres that can be found in the language. These genres serve specific purpose in the daily activities of the people (Eme & Mbagwu, 2011; Anaso & Nwabudike, 2014). It is important to state that it is the different manipulations of language and language use that distinguish one genre from another. As such, the different flexible but predictable pattern of the tones of the language is what generates the differences in the poetic genres. There are specific poetic genres for specific purposes. For instance, there is a hunter's poetry and dirge, there is masquerade genre of the Yoruba literature; there is a

genre for a new bride, among others. Yoruba indigenous advertising can be categorized as a separate genre of oral literature and this is because of the similar rendering patterns to those that are mentioned above. Since the focus of this study is on the role of gender in Yoruba indigenous advertising, it is necessary to consider how the effect of language could help analyse the language of the gender that is more associated with advertising in the Yoruba society.

### **Gender and Yoruba Indigenous Advertising**

Gender issues have been evaluated within different fields of study. In fact, the study of gender in African Studies and in other areas of global studies can be said to have been given some fair attention (Fokwang, 2006; Sunderland, 2014; Anyidoho, 2020; etc). However, same could not be said of gender and indigenous advertising in general and Yoruba indigenous advertising in particular. This is also one of the reasons why I have brought this topic to bear in this article. On a general note, works on indigenous advertising is not popular. To the best of the knowledge of the author, there has been very scanty strictly published work that directly addresses Yoruba indigenous advertising. It is pertinent then to state that Yoruba contemporary advertising and/or advertisement may have been the reason why indigenous advertising has not experienced some analysis in the literature. One of the reasons for this is perhaps the shift from the traditional method of calling attention of potential buyers to products and services for purchase, just by the words of mouth, to the diverse contemporary platforms that are now readily available in the society.

Gender issue has been approached from diverse angles in relation to its role in the society. There are already numerous scholars that have worked on this topic and this might have created some frictions when it comes to a general consensus on the definition and semantics of the term gender. For this reason, for the purpose of this study, I will employ the UNESCO article, 'Handbook for Gender Focal Points in

UNESCO National Commissions' definitions of key concepts and terms', which defines gender as roles and responsibilities of men and women that are created in our families, our societies and our cultures. In a nutshell, gender can be defined as the role that the different categories of humans play in societal development.

It is interesting to state that in Africa in general, and among the Yoruba people in particular, men and women are divided through the line of social responsibility (Ajikobi, 1999). In as much as there might be areas of overlap between the responsibilities expected of men and women in the society, yet, there are clear-cut distinctions which spread from within the home to the larger society. Although, some schools of thought in gender studies believe that gender categorisation in Africa, and indeed in most parts of the world, is being relegated to the background. Some scholars have however addressed these insinuations and concluded that the agitations coming from some quarters, claiming that African women are being marginalized, is an ordinary wolf cry. Ngubane (2010, p. 2) opines that:

In African culture and African traditional life, gender is defined according to roles and functions in the society. It is what it means to be male or female in a certain society that shapes the opportunities one is offered in life, the roles one may play, and the kinds of relationships one may have.

The point deduced from the above quote is that the issue of gender imbalance in Africa might actually be a wolf cry, meaning that it does not exist in the real sense of the term.

Considering the specifics in gender analysis among the Yoruba, especially when considered from the market involvement platform, women have been considered a major player in the market

management and consequently creating awareness about some certain products.

Another view of the assertion relating to African women participation in open markets is highlighted in Clark (2010, p. 46) as stated below: The self-confidence and group solidarity of women traders impressed them partly because it contradicted European gender stereotypes, although comparable enclaves were not unknown in the European informal sector.

In the Yoruba society, women play prominent roles that culminated into conspicuous developmental agenda for the entire Yoruba and indeed African worldview. This is represented in one of the proverbs of the Yoruba people that:

Kí ọkùnrin rí ejò,  
Kí obìnrin pa á.  
Kí ejò ọ́ má lẹ́.

Attempted translation of the proverb is:

If a man sees a snake,  
And a woman kills the snake,  
The most important thing is  
for the snake to be killed.

The above proverb suggests that both men and women are capable of carrying out any task, no matter how difficult since killing a snake can be considered as a very dangerous exercise.

It is important to state here that this paper is not addressing the superior-inferior dichotomy in gender among the Yoruba people, while it is also necessary to present the fact that the roles played by the different genders in an African society in general and in Yoruba society particularly are specifically identified and respected. The

focus of this study therefore, is to consider the roles of both genders in the process of advertising through the indigenous medium of communication.

Advertising could be considered as a means of marketing communication through which a product is made known to people through a medium of communication (Oyesomi and Salawu, 2019). In a simple and direct term, advertising involves the process of telling people about a product and/or service with the hope that they will be convinced to purchase the product and/or service. Indigenous advertising, which is the traditional method of communicating and convincing buyers, is done through the indigenous language of the people. It is the responsibility of the advertiser to make sure that the effect of advertising gets to all so that they can be convinced to patronize the seller (Lapsanská 2006).

Since the purpose of advertising is to be able to create an awareness about the product for the buyers to purchase it, the language of the advert is carefully selected in a way that will be very endearing to all. Even when an individual does not have the intention to buy, he can change his mind if the language is carefully and beautifully presented. This is the reasons why indigenous advertising is considered as a poetic genre (Faleti, 1969; Ogundele, 1982). The rising pitch feature, which is very common in the rendition of Yoruba poetic expressions is also attested in indigenous advertising. Many a times, sellers resolve to singing while describing their products to potential buyers. All these advertising activities could be analysed based on gender roles in the Yoruba society. This is considered as an aspect of the human socioeconomic contribution to societal development. In this study, I evaluate the male-female dichotomy in the process in indigenous advertising through the Yoruba language use.



## **Literature Review**

It is germane to point out that the use of language by women is distinct, and different from that of men. Wahyuningsih (2018) is a report that investigates the differences in the use of language between male and female students. The findings show that there are obvious differences in use of language through form, content and use. The investigation shows that men tend to be more direct in their use of language but for women, they appear to be more expressive and polite. The study also concluded that females are more likely to be meticulous in the way they use language, considering their syntax and stylistics. Also, Xia (2013) carefully traced the conclusion of scholars on the dichotomy of language use between male and female. The author examines the differences in the use of language between male and female in the aspects of pronunciation, intonation, vocabulary, syntax, language attitude, non-verbal usage and topic choice. In all, Xia established that females are more likely to use language better than males. For instance, the author affirms that pronunciation is better achieved with females. Females also like to speak in a high-pitch voice than males. On the case of vocabulary, Xia concluded that females are more careful in choosing their vocabulary than males; and this is the reason why females are very comfortable with the use of colourful and flowery words. Concerning syntax, Xia also observed that females are more likely to elongate their syntactic construction especially with the use of modulations, interrogatives and imperative sentences. These conclusions support the fact that women are better language users than men. This assertion speaks to the focus of the paper, if Xia's position is to be considered, that females will approach indigenous advertising in a more advantageous way than men. Since the essence of advertising is to gain the confidence of buyers, the factors listed above seem to favour females to be better advertisers than males.

Osoba and Oluwamusani (2017) is a work that analyses Yorùbá discourse between men and women in selected indigenous movies using six variables namely, hedges, intensifiers, minimal responses, question tag, taboo words and politeness. One of the findings of the study is that women employ more of these variables in the speech process than their male counterparts, as observed in the selected movies by the authors. From these findings, it is observed that out of the variables employed by Osoba and Oluwamusani, intensifier seems to be the most vital variable useful for the purpose of advertising. Overall, considering the peculiarities of language, as pointed out in the literatures cited above, it has been established that women are better placed in the use of language than men and this is expected to create differences in the gender disposition of the language use in Yoruba indigenous advertising.

### **Theoretical Perspective**

The theory that is employed for this study is the social role theory. This theory was propounded by A.H. Eagly in 1987. The crux of the theory encompasses gender roles between men and women in the society in which there might be a stereotyped role for each of the gender (Eagly, 1987 and Eagly and Wood, 2012). This theory posits that gender division of labour is a characteristic of a society and that this gives men and women differentiated skills.

In the Yoruba society, gender division of labour is prominent, not only in the advertising structure but also in the general structure and set-up of the family. The male, mainly produces the products to be marketed by the female. As such, advertising is part of the dexterity needed by the female to successfully market the products. The products are either hawked or taken to the market to be displayed for potential buyers. Traditionally, hawking is the main source of indigenous advertising in the Yoruba society. This is because the sellers need to announce their arrival and the type of products that

they have to sell. Some of the features that make up the qualities of a good advertisement is the ability to be able to call the attention of a potential buyer using a good and sonorous voice; an advertising call that is close to song and the style with which that is done.

We should note that an advertiser should show great enthusiasm while making the advertising call as it is said that a dispirited individual cannot possess the ability to bring people together. These qualities are better known with women than men in African cosmology. It is almost a given that the female gender, more than their male counterpart, are involved in the process of indigenous advertising. This is considered as part of the sociocultural structure of the people, where the traditional Yoruba girl-child is trained mainly by the mother and the boy-child follows the steps of the father.

### **Methodology**

In this study, the mix of qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection is used. Since advertising is carried out in both designated market situations (open markets) and non-designated market environments, it is observed that these indigenous advertising can be carried out in both conditions. The data for the indigenous advertising are collected from different designated market locations and non-designated markets during the hawking procedure by sellers in Lagos, Nigeria. The motivation for the data collection splits into two. First, the gender status of the advertisers and second, the gender representation as to how the language of the advert is able to represent gender contents in Yoruba indigenous advertising. Out of the adverts that are collected, seven advertisement with different gender motivated themes were selected in order to analyse the conception of how much each gender is involved in the construction of the syntax of advertising and the inherent meaning of the adverts in relation to gender.

## Presentation and Analysis

Two analytical approaches will be employed for gender representation in the Yoruba indigenous advertising data collected, they are, (1) gender in relation to the advertisers; and (2) gender as it relates to the content of the advertising. This includes the content of the adverts as presented by the language propensity.

In Yoruba cosmology, markets are synonymous with the female gender. A Yoruba axiom corroborates this assertion that: *ọjà gbá obìnrin jọ*, 'markets gather women together'. Although, new contemporary realities have created an environment where men have been involved in the various market processes, this still does not translate to the fact that women are not the gender in charge of the markets. It is pertinent to note that male specific markets now exist in the Yoruba society and this is due to the contemporary demands of having modern hardware products like computer and its accessories being displayed in the open market.

The data are hereby presented and the content of gender display is analysed.

1. Ọkọ mi ló ń gbìń ìn èmi ni mò ń tà á

Husband my is Cont. plant it me is my cont. sell it

It is my husband that plants it, I am the one that sells it

In the above advertisement, the context shows that the seller is a woman. It shows that her husband is a farmer, who plants and deliver for his wife to sell. Although, the advertised product is not directly mentioned, the advert connotes that the product is a farm produce. The societal role of the genders is displayed. While the male gender provides the products, the female gender sells it. And the situation is explained in the advertisement. The context of this advertisement speaks to the social role theory. It clearly expresses the roles of the gender.

2. Eerín o pòróntò, àgbàdo oko bàbá àgbà  
maize o big, maize farm father elder  
Big Maize, the maize from grandfather's farm

The advertisement in (2) expresses that the product being advertised is a produce from the grandfather's farm. The language of the advertisement is carefully used to present the maize as that of the grandfather's farm. It suggests, in a way that there is a credence to any produce from the grandfather's farm. It is noted that it is the woman that always use this type of language as seen in the advertisement in (1) and (2) above.

There are other cases of Yoruba indigenous advertising where the targeted gender is expressed in the advertisement. Consider (3) below:

3. Mo gbe e dé o, ìyá káàbò ọmọ kúulé  
Pron. carry it come o, mother welcome, child thank you  
I have brought it, welcome mother, hello children.

It is obvious that the target buyer for this type of advertising is the woman. The product being advertised here is any form of snack. As such, “ìyá káàbò, ọmọ kúulé” has been considered as a generic name for any form of snack among the Yoruba people. Note that this advertisement, just like (1), above does not represent a particular type of product. However, the psychology of the role of the gender in (3) suggests that mothers are used to buying snacks for the children whenever they return home to meet the children. As such, the advertisement call could be made by either of male or female seller but its targeted towards women. This does not mean that there cannot be male buyers.

A variant of the advertising in (3) is: ọmọ ó bèèrè àbò ọjà (children will ask of what you brought from the market). Although, this variant does not state a particular gender, but it is induced that the children are

expecting the snack from their mother as against the father.

A form of advertising is description. The products are described using a language that will be very appealing to potential buyers. Also, as part of describing the product, a seller can describe the event that would follow the aftermath of the product that is purchased. Even while doing this, the gender that is involved in such event is mainly the women.

Consider the advertisement below:

4. Irú rée ọkọ ọbè

Locust-beans this husband soup

This is locust beans, soup's husband.

The language literary feature employed to describe locust beans as the husband of soup is personification. The locust bean is represented as the husband while the soup is presented as the wife. Since what locust beans does is to add flavor to the soup, it is then concluded that the husband also adds flavor to the wife or to the home in a typical African society.

Another advertisement that describes what could happen after the purchase of a product is presented in (5):

5. Ẹ rarú ẹ sebè

Prn. buy.locust-beans prn cook.soup

Buy locust beans to cook soup

Ajẹbókọrẹ̀in-ín òfófó

Pref.eat.with.husband.laugh gossip

That which you eat and makes you laugh heartily with your husband

Ajẹdìgbòlọkọ wĩ

Pref.fall.on.husband heavily

That which you eat and flirts with your husband

The above advertisement falls under the category of those that are specifically targeted towards a particular gender. It shows social

acceptance of the fact that women are responsible for cooking in the household. Also, there has not been any evidence of a male selling locust beans. Even if there are cases of male buying the product, this does not change the language of the advertisement such that the female gender will be substitute for male in the advert line.

Furthermore, advertisement call of an insecticide is targeted towards the male gender.

6. Ó ñ paáyán o

Pron. Prog. kill.cockroach o.

It kills cockroaches

Ó ñ pàdun

Pron. Prog. kill.bug o.

It kills bugs

Ó ñpòpòlò ẹ̀lẹ̀sẹ̀ kan

Pron. Prog. kill.toad leg one,

It kills a one-legged toad

Bùròdá ẹ̀ wá ràkan

Brother Pron. come buy.one

Brother come and buy one

The locally produced insecticide is advertised by a man. And man is also the target buyer. This means that it is the responsibility of the man to get rid of insects from the house. This does not mean that there are no female buyers for this product. But the language of the advertisement is stereotyped to target the male gender as a potential buyer.

My proposal in this report is that as expressed in different literatures, women are better language users, especially in an oral form as displayed in the Yoruba indigenous advertising. This assertion supports African women as the main actors in the process of advertising products.

Let us consider the advertisement in (7) below:

7.        Ẹ kààrọ́ ológì déo,  
 Pron. good.morning seller.pap arrive o  
 Good morning, here comes the pap seller,  
 Ìyá Áyì, ẹ kààrọ́ ology dé o,  
 Mother Ayi, Pron. good.morning seller.pap arrive o  
 Ayi's mother, good morning, the pap seller is here,  
 Ìyá eléwédú,  
 mother seller.vegetable  
 The vegetable seller,  
 Àjóké, ẹ ra ògì o  
 Ajoke, Pron. buy pap o  
 Ajoke, come and buy pap

The advertising call above is done by a woman, calling out to her customers, who are all females also. The female gender and its representation are very dominant and conspicuous in the advertising procedure of the Yoruba people.

## **Conclusion**

There are evidences of male advertisers also, but the bulk of Yoruba indigenous advertising is carried out by the female gender and the language of the advertisement is carefully structured in a way that appeals to the potential buyers. The implication is that women possess special features that allow them use language with ease and especially in advertising.

Furthermore, since the indigenous advertising is considered as a form of poetic genre, the sonority of the female voice puts them in an appropriate position to call for sellers through advertising. This thesis speaks to the social role theory which identifies that different roles are established for different genders in a society.

Considering the different levels and categories of indigenous advertising which includes conviction, description and pleading, it is more convenient for women to make use of these variables than men.



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