

GENDER AND LANGUAGE OF THE HOLY BIBLE IN ENGLISH: IMPLICATIONS FOR HUMAN AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

Language, an instrument of communication which “sert à analyser l'expérience humaine ... dans chaque communauté ...” (Martinet, 1970:20), is unique to the homo sapiens. One acquires one's first language without conscious awareness. While growing up, one expands his linguistic horizon and develops an awareness of knowledge of events, people and phenomena in his environment. This knowledge constitutes one's culture. Since language is a non-instinctive method of self expression and of interpreting one's environment and world-view, there exists an inseparable relationship between language and culture. The foregoing summarizes the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis which constitutes the framework of this study. Wallwork (1974:12) adds that language, a social regulator which serves in influencing people, is by that same feature also a tool for “manipulating” them. Language-use in any society therefore needs to be negotiated for mutual acceptance by its users. This study, based on the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis and the pragmatics of Wallwork, is concerned with the gender-marked language of the Holy Bible in some of its English language versions and the implications of this for human and women's rights in Africa. The first part of this study attempts to justify the theoretical framework of the study, and this is followed by a discussion on gender and language. The third part of the paper presents instances of gender-marked language in The Holy Bible in English, while part four examines this feature in the face of contemporary gender awareness in Africa, particularly in its feminist dimension. The study concludes by highlighting the implications of this on the mental attitude of women and the society in general towards the hitherto accepted gender-marked language of the Holy Bible in English which is now being regarded and rejected as a form of oppression and human and women's rights violation.

Keywords: Culture, language, gender, Bible language, women's rights.

INTRODUCTION

Language, an instrument of communication, is limited to the human race, the homo-sapiens. Martinet (1970:20) points out that “cet instrument de communication sert à analyser l'expérience humaine différemment dans chaque communauté...” Sapir (1921:7) conceives language as being “a purely human and non-instinctive method of communication of ideas, emotions and desires by voluntary symbols.” The Whorfian hypothesis (1956) adds that a person's native language defines the way he perceives and interprets his world, because there exists a relationship between language and culture. And culture represents the entire ideal or the totality of knowledge one acquires about the nature of things and the people of a particular social group in which one finds oneself. While acquiring our first language without conscious awareness during our physical development, we are developing awareness of our knowledge of the things and people in our environment. This constitutes our culture. This knowledge of our culture defines our social behavior which is regulated by language.

Little wonder why Chomsky (1972) affirms that the study of language is the study of the human 'essence'. Wallwork (1974:12) adds that language as a social regulator is used for self expression, for conveying orders and information and for influencing people. The use of language for influencing people could be said to also include as a feature 'manipulating' people: this means making people behave in a certain way even without their knowing it or even against their best wishes or interest. In this case, we talk about linguistic manipulation used by the powerful in the society to tell us what to do. It could be defined as successful 'veiling' of societal oppression by the use of manipulatory language (Mey, 2001:308). In other words, language is used as a tool to declare one's intention, be they positive or otherwise, to control one's environment.

Based on the above, one can safely agree with the Whorfian hypothesis that social behavior, an aspect of people's culture, is captured in language. Hence McConnell-Ginet (1989:49) points out that 'language matters so much because meanings... must be produced and reproduced, negotiated in situated contexts of communication.' This implies that language use in any social group needs to be negotiated for the purpose of mutual acceptance between the users themselves in their daily social communicative relations and interactions.

These facts were recently demonstrated by an incident concerning the use of gender-marked language in a Bible study class attended by one of the authors of this paper. The young Bible teacher who conducted this lesson, titled, "Conditions for '**Sonship**' in the Kingdom," in English, was using the King James version (KJV) of the Holy Bible and was expounding the scriptures in John 1:12 and John 3:3 among others. John 1:12 says:

But as many as received Him, to them gave he power to become the **Sons** of God, even to them that believed on His name.

The first reaction during the "Questions session" of the class was by a lady who felt distressed because the preacher implied that "daughters" of the church did not seem to have a place in the "kingdom of God". She hinged her displeasure on the fact that the topic of the lesson, the scripture references read, and the teacher's entire discussion all spoke exclusively of "Sons of God" and "Sons of the Kingdom". The other women in the class applauded her observation. Efforts to address the "women's protest" included two interesting issues. First, some of the scripture references were read in other versions of the Holy Bible which did not use gender marked words like, **sons, man**, etc, which "offended" the women. For instance, in the New International Version (NIV), John 1:12 reads:

Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in His name, he gave right to become **children** of God. (emphasis ours).

Secondly, both the young minister and the Pastor avoided gender-marked words in the remaining part of the lesson and ever since.

This incident raised, in the minds of the authors of this paper, an issue concerning gender-marked language in the Holy Bible and its implications in the light of:

- a. The dogmatic nature of religious discourse and
- b. The liberationist and human rights concerns of feminist and gender discourse. This paper is the outcome of our study on this issue.

The first part will briefly mention and justify our theoretical framework while the second section will discuss gender and language. The third section will examine instances of gender-marked language used in the Holy Bible while the fourth will examine this feature in the face of feminism. The next section will apply our theoretical framework on gender marked

language use. The conclusion will elicit its implications for the freedom of society from mental attitudes, beliefs and cultural practices which portend oppression and discrimination against women.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis

Sapir (1921:8) defines Language as a “pure human and non-instinctive method of communication of ideas, emotions and desires by voluntarily produced symbols.” This falls in line with Essien’s (1983) submission that “language is a thing with which we can best imagine, create, aspire, desire, feel and express our soul, enlarge our mental horizon and fulfill all that man is capable of.” Block and Trager (1942:5) cited in Essien (2010:12) recognize it as a tool by which a social group co-operates. To Mercer and Wanderer (1970:36) language, the basic tool for communication constitutes the pivot, the controlling factor of the process by which man maintains the social group to which he owes his very existence as a personality.

All the above portray language as a social regulator through communication. The said communication implies that various individuals within a social group attach common meanings to the same symbols. The symbols could be vocalized, could be written words, gestures or a combination of these. Communication generally involves the following:

1. The minds of the sender and receiver of the message.
2. The symbols used in communicating the message.
3. Meaning attached to the symbols.

Meaning is emitted from the mental interpretation of the ‘Signifie’ (Martinet, 1970:15) which manifests at the level of the significant as ‘word’. And the combination of words produces language.

Language, a tool by which the mind is expressed and experiences analysed and interpreted can be considered as the mirror of the mind, therefore of the soul (Sapir, 1921, Essien, 2003:16). These are the facts which have informed the choice of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis as the theoretical framework best suited for this type of study, which borders on the influence of language on the mind and on certain concepts like gender. The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, named after the American Linguist, Edward Sapir (1882-1939) and his follower, Benjamin L. Whorf (1897-1941) consists of two associated principles, namely:

- I. Linguistic determinism which states that language influences thought and
- II. Linguistic relativity which maintains that language influences the way one perceives and interpretes his world.

Sapir (1929) expounds that “the language habits of our community predispose certain choices of interpretation”. And our study is concerned with women’s interpretation of male gender marked language in the Holy Bible on the basis of contemporary feminist and gender consciousness.

GENDER AND LANGUAGE-USE

Gender could be defined as the biological distinction in sex between the male and female of each species (Yule, 2006). Beauvior (in Ritzer (ed.) 2005:304) and Scott and Marshal (ed.) (2005:240) conceive gender as the socially constructed unequal distinction made when we use words like, ‘man’ and ‘woman’ to define masculine and feminine modes of behavior

considered normal and natural for males and females. Grammatical gender is the distinction between the masculine and feminine, used to classify nouns in such languages like French: **Le soleil** (masc.) – the ‘sun’, **la lune** (fem.) the ‘moon’ or Spanish: **el sol** (masc.) the ‘sun’, **la luna** (fem.) – the ‘moon’. Sex is biologically defined while gender is culturally constructed. The term, ‘gender’ has since become extended farther above the level of individual identity or personality to also embody the symbolic level comprising cultural ideals and ‘stereotypes’ of masculinity and femininity. At the structural level, it covers sexual division of labour, institutions and organizations.

Feminism, according to Scott and Marshal (ed.) (2005:218) is a social movement combining theory and political practices which seek to achieve equality between men and women. As a doctrine, it suggests that women are systematically disadvantaged in modern society. Thus, it is the movement for liberating women from oppression. Born of the 17th and 18th century liberalism in England with Mary Wollstonecraft’s plea for the rights of women to vote, access to education and the professions (Scott and Marshal, 2005:218) spanning the globe from mid-nineteenth century onward, it burst into flames in the 1960s when liberal feminism was identified with Betty Friedan, author of the **Feminine Mystique**, which focused on discriminatory policies that result in unequal civil rights, educational and occupational opportunities. Feminism consistently involves the challenge of social change.

One aspect of human life in which feminism has made far reaching impact is language-use. Feminism has done a lot to erase the male gender mark on language use wherever it is observed. This is apparent in languages like French where distinction is made between the masculine and feminine forms of words that refer to human beings in social functions. Compare for example, the French words like “compagnon” (male companion) and “compagne” (female companion). The degree of gender markedness has since evolved.

In the 10th edition of **Le Bon Usage**¹, (1975:205) feminism has tried to prove that women could also attain those high positions and take on professions previously regarded as the exclusive preserve of men. This position saw the creation of hitherto in existent feminine forms for the names of some functions and professions such as:

dessinateur/dessinatrice (one who draws, artist)
chirurgien/chirurgienne (surgeon)
pharmacien/pharmacienne (pharmacist)
senateur/senatrice (senator)
directeur/directrice (director) etc

Le Bon Usage later noted that:

Feminism, having won access to the positions and functions hitherto reserved for men, now delights in also winning the masculine appellations corresponding to these positions and functions, even when feminine forms of such appellations exist in the language.²

Hence, we have “Madame X, Conservateur au Musée National” instead of “Madame X, Conservatrice au Musée National” (Mrs X, Conservator at the National Museum).

In English, the term “Chairperson” is used when a female is the incumbent, instead of “Chairman”. In the U.S.A., the current word used is simply “Chair”, so that the gender mark, whether denotative or connotative, is completely erased.

Gender marked language use is the use of words and expressions which semantically refer to male or female human beings when the referent in linguistic terms is the human kind in general. Thus instead of an expression such as “The person who kills shall be killed”, a male-

gender-marked usage would say, a “man who kills shall be killed”, even though a woman who kills would equally be killed under this prescription.

Feminism and Gender-marked Language-Use

The current position of feminism concerning gender mark in language use is to completely remove such a mark, which, so to say, carries the nuance of discrimination against the female sex. In the feminist view such discrimination represents the oppressive structures in the human mind. Language, as stated in the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis influences the way the human mind perceives the world. (cf. sect.) As advanced by current feminist liberation theorists like Welch³, Diamond and Quirby⁴, until such oppressive psychological and cultural structures are completely erased from the human mind and the society respectively, human kind cannot be said to be really free. Such then is the extent to which feminist philosophy can go to bring about a better human life, consequently a better society, by extending its tentacles into human culture. And one of the very fundamental aspects of human culture is religion, a powerful coercive force which, just like language, pervades the human essence.

Gender-Marked Language in the Holy Bible

One particularly interesting domain of human linguistic culture in which feminism has began to use its ‘gender’ praxis to bring about a liberated human society is the language of religion. Our interest in religion arises from the fact that, as William James (in Mercer and Wanderer, 1970:264) puts it,

“Religion is personal, is a matter of... the feelings, acts, and experiences of the individual men in their solitude... as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider as divine.”

Secondly, religion penetrates the indepth essence of creatures called ‘human beings’ since they are – “feeling as well as knowing creatures.” (Davis, 1949:517). Lastly and more importantly, the social functions of religion include the preservation of continuity, order or predictable patterns of change in a society, a community or a social group. These functions are vital for the development of human personality because to a large extent, man is a product of the social interactions of human organisms. And, the “inner-wheel” controlling these interactions and the consequences thereof, is language.

This is why, we are particularly concerned with language use as can be observed in the modern day translation of the Christian Holy Scriptures. In this respect, we shall limit ourselves to the New Testament. It shall be observed later on in this discussion that the male gender-marked words and expressions in the scripture passages have been replaced with gender-free ones systematically. This phenomenon is interesting when one considers the dogmatic nature of religion and its manifestations – be it its language, belief or practices as being resistant to change.

So the aim of this paper is to examine the dynamics of the attempt by feminist praxis of the concept of “gender” to change the language of the Christian scriptures from a manifestly male gender-marked to a gender-free language. This will be followed by a study of the implications of this praxis on human society and culture with respect to the feminist philosophy of liberation.

The study shall be based on the translations done in the:

- a. King James Version (KJV) of the Bible (published in 19611, reprinted with corrections in 1942);

- b. Revised Standard Version (RSV) as published in 1952 and reprinted with corrections in 1971;
- c. New World Translation (NWT) of the Holy Bible as published in parts from 1950 to 1960, and in one volume in 1961, revised in 1970, 1971 and 1984;
- d. The Bible in Today's English Version (TEV) as published in parts between 1966 to 1976, and in one volume in 1976;
- e. New International Version (NIV) published in parts from 1967, and in one volume in 1973, revised in 1978 and in 1984; and
- f. New Jerusalem Bible (NJB) published in 1973.

The KJV will serve as the basis for the male gender-marked feature of the language renderings of passages while such features as given in the other versions will be compared to it (the KJV).

TOWARDS A GENDER-FREE LANGUAGE USE IN THE CHRISTIAN SCRIPTURE: A CRITICAL VIEW

Even a cursory study of the modern day translations of the Christian scriptures tend to reveal a general tendency to replace the male-gender marked words or expressions of the KJV with gender free ones where the referent is mankind in general.

In John 1:12, we read as follows from the different versions cited above:

KJV: But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the **sons of God**.⁵

RSV: But to all who received him, ...he gave power to become **children of God**.

NWT: However, as many as did receive him, to them he gave authority to become God's **children**.

NIV: Yet to all who received him... he gave the right to become **children of God**.

NJB: But to those who did accept him, he gave power to become **children of God**.

TEV: Some, however, did receive him... so he gave them the right to become **God's children**.

This same use of the word "son" or "sons" by the KJV, and of some other gender-free words by other versions in consonance with the reality implied – humankind, can also be found in I Corinth 4:14; Phil. 2:15; and I John 3:1-2, to mention but a few.

The word "man" and such other male marked expressions (each man, everyman, men, etc.) are frequently used to refer to human kind. In a good number of places where this has happened in the KJV, other versions have used gender-free words or expressions. For example, Matt. 5:40 reads in part as follows in the different versions:

KJV: If **any man** will sue thee at the law...

RSV: And if **anyone** would sue you...

NWT: And if **a person** wants to go to court with you...

NIV: And if **someone** wants to sue you...

NJB: If **someone** wishes to go to law with you...

TEV: And if **someone** wants to sue you...

A few other examples of the replacement of male gender marked word in the KJV by non-male gender marked ones are given here for further study in other versions. They are: Matt. 5:11, 15, 19; Matt. 6:24; John 1:18; John 6:44-46; John 8:10-11, 33, 51-52; John 10:18, 28-29; I Corinth 12:7; Gal. 6:1, 3-5,7,10; Eph. 5:8; Phil. 2:4; I Thess. 3:3,12; I John 5:16.

It is important to point out that it is not all the time an outright case of the use of non-male gender marked words by all other versions whenever the KJV uses male-gender-marked words to refer to human kind. To justify some of these discrepancies, let us look into a combination of the historical – critical studies of the texts of the scriptures and the translation principles that gave birth to the different versions. For instance, John 17:12 reads in part in the versions used for this study:

KJV: ... but the **son** of perdition

RSV: ... but the **son** of perdition

NWT: ...except the **son** of destruction

NIV: ... except the **one** doomed to destruction

NJB: ... except the **one** who was destined to be lost

TEV: ... except the **man** who was destined to be lost.

It can be observed that, all the post KJV translations, except the NJB and the NIV, use male gender marked words – “son” or “man”. Studies of the scriptural texts have pointed to the fact that the use of “son” or “man” here refers to Judas Iscariot, as can be seen by reference to John 18:9. In the circumstance, the decision of NJB and NIV to use the gender-neutral term “one” may only be explained by their translation principles.

The text of I Corinth 7:23 is another instance in which different reasons may explain the different renderings of male-gender marked texts or passages by modern-day versions. It reads:

KJV: Ye are brought with a price, **be not ye the servants of men.**

RSV: You were bought with a price, **do not become slaves to men.**

NWT: ... stop becoming slaves to **men.**

NIV: ... do not be slaves now to any **human being.**

NJB: ... do not become slaves of **men.**

TEV: ... so do not become slaves of **men.**

ANALYSIS

The explanation to the use of the male gender marked word “men” by all, except the NJB seems to lie in some cultural context which the translators wish to retain. Studies of the Judeo-Christian society of the first century by Eakin (1977) have portrayed that society to have been a predominantly patriarchal one. In particular, Eakin has shown that only men could own property, including slaves. Thus if one was a slave, he could be that only to a man. Even though what is meant in the context is that the Christian faithful to which the Pauline epistle was sent should not become slaves again to human ideas, but to Christ’s (cf. verse 22), some liberal touch to the expression may have been needed to press the message vividly to the target audience of Paul, occasioning the use of a word which literally refers to the adult male human who could own slaves. Our modern-day translators must have thought like their counterparts of the TEV who said in the preface to their version that

Faithfulness in translation also includes a faithful representation of the cultural and historical features of the original, without any attempt to modernize the text.

From the foregoing analysis, it has been seen that there exist cultural and textual considerations which tend to hinder an outright overthrow of male-gender-marked use of language to express gender-free situations. It is also discovered that when these considerations are not cogent enough to deter Bible versions like NJB or even NIV from a gender-marked language with a gender-free one, then one falls back on the reasoning that this attitude is the brain child of feminism. This is why the section which follows intends to establish whether or not, and to what extent feminism is responsible for this feature in Biblical language.

MALE GENDER MARK FEATURE OF THE SCRIPTURAL LANGUAGE IN THE FACE OF FEMINISM

For clarification of the questions that have arisen from the comparative studies of the versions of the Christian scriptures about gender-markedness of language, we refer to historicity. Feminism has been very active in the transformation of language since the dying years of the first half of last century when most of the translations of the scriptures were done. The period witnessed significant concerns over the modern-day translations and expressions of the message of the scriptures,⁶ with the aim of rendering such message in contemporary language. The oldest of the modern-day translations, the RSV, is the closest to the KJV in terms of the use of male gender mark features. Thus Matt. 5:11 in KJV reads:

Blessed are you when men shall revile you...

And in RSV

Blessed are you when men revile you

Whereas all the other versions use the gender-free words “people” in place of ‘men’. Other such examples are found in I Thess. 4:6,8; Matt. 5:15; I John 4:12; Gal. 6:7,10; to mention but a few.

On the other hand, it is also significant that the NJB which takes the lead in the use of gender-free words, as observed in the comparative study of the versions, carries an open declaration of its commitment to feminist considerations in translating the Christian scriptures into contemporary language. Thus the General Editor’s Foreword to the NJB, reads that:

Considerable efforts have also been made, though not at all costs, to soften the inbuilt preference of the English Language, a preference now found so offensive by some people, for the masculine; *the word of the Lord concerns women and men equally.* (emphasis ours)

Effect of Feminist-Influence on the Language of Christian scripture

From the above analysis, it is now possible to establish three degrees of the evolution of the influence of the feminist attitude towards gender, as it affects the language of the Christian Holy scriptures. The first degree is represented by the RSV where the influence is minor.

The second generation of modern Bible translations is represented by the other three versions, namely: the NWT, the NIV and the TEV in which their language-use reflects gender consciousness. The third generation is represented by the NJB which directly participates in the feminist campaign to the extent that it takes it into serious consideration and seeks to lessen the friction generated by the male gender mark features of language-use in the society. At this point, it is only logical to state that feminism has successfully carried its linguistic

struggles into the domain of religion, and has successfully transformed the language of the holy Christian scriptures. It is therefore reasonable that the implications of this success of feminism, up to the linguistic domain of the Holy Scriptures, be examined with regards to the goals and aspirations of the feminist philosophy.

In examining the implications, the focus will specifically be on the African people of the Commonwealth of the English language within the context of the fact that the translations of the scriptures are, as stated in the preface to the TEV, “intended for people anywhere for who English is either their mother tongue or a language they learn.”

FEMINISM, GENDER AND LANGUAGE OF THE SCRIPTURES: IMPLICATIONS FOR ENGLISH SPEAKING AFRICANS

The ideals and goals of feminist enterprise right from its origin and during its evolution were based on the theory and practice of liberation, resistance and revolution.⁷ If:

The American and French Revolutions provided a basis for feminism by promoting... and making rebellion legitimate...⁸

Then feminism of the early years of the last century has learnt that the theory of revolution as expounded by Welech Sharon (19...) is a continuous process until all oppressive structures of the human mind and society are removed. This way, feminism goes beyond liberation of women from structures put in place by man to the liberation of women from the women themselves, of men from women, of the men from men, even of human kind from itself. And it is through language, the regulatory force, used by human kind for social contact, that the said liberation can come to be. This “prise de conscience” which favoured the fight for equality between men and women engendered the creation of feminine forms of words (cf sect.) hitherto preserved for men. “Unisex” linguistic culture came into existence and constituted the springboard from which the search for gender-marked words and expressions in the language of religion commenced. Within this framework this paper will now examine the implications of feminist influence on language-use in the Holy Bible as it concerns the category of gender.

What the preface of the Revised Standard Version observes about the King James Version is in fact true of all the versions of the Holy Bible used in private and public worship and study. That preface states that the KJV has:

Entered, as no other book has, into the making of the personal character and the public institutions of the English speaking peoples.

There is no doubt about the exactitude of this observation considering the power that religion exerts on the human mind and therefore of its various forms of personal and social manifestations on the individual’s character and on public structures. If the KJV, with its outmoded language could ‘enter’ and was still entering into the making of personal character and public institutions in modern times, then modern-day translations should ‘enter’ much more deeply into the above mentioned with greater efficacy, using unclouded language in expressing the message of the scriptures. Any linguistic sign conveying a message is made of the ‘signifié’ and the “significant” Martinet 1970:) The “signifié” (concept) with its inherent semantic import never goes unnoticed, particularly when there is basis for comparison.

So as long as people have cause to read from the KJV and from any of the modern-day versions, the preference for non-male-gender-marked words and expressions in these versions

will be brought to the fore. The first thing that results from the awareness of such a shift of language style in the Bible is likely to be the fact that feminism and its linguistic creed has gained the sanction of the church. There is certainly no doubt about the authority and weight that the church still enjoys, particularly in these days of evangelical and spiritual revival across the globe. Within the general framework of the feminist philosophy of external resistance, this idea encourages the continued claims to the equality of man and woman. As the divine sanctions to such equality as suggested by the adoption of male-gender free language by the scriptures, enters into the making of individual characters, human society is likely to enter into an era of the more readily accepted norms of human rights.

Africa in particular, where sexist norms are still in greater force than in the western world, stands to gain enormously from this development where many countries are participants in the commonwealth of English Language. This socio-linguistic fact is the consequence of history. For instance, a study of passages in the Efik Bible⁹ used in establishing this shift in language use in the English Language versions, does not reveal this shift in language use, and so cannot create the needed awareness in question.

RELEVANCE OF THE SAPIR-WHORF HYPOTHESIS

Earlier on in this discussion, we mentioned that individuals in a particular linguistic community attach common meanings to the same symbols and that language portrays the world in a symbolic fashion. We also indicated that through language, the mind is expressed and experiences are analysed, hence language is seen as the mirror of the soul. These facts clearly expounded in the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis of linguistic determinism and relativity point out the significant connection between the mind and consciousness. Marx and Engels (1974:51) as cited in Mey, 2001, state that language is our practical consciousness. Dupré (1966:155) adds that “consciousness is determined by language...”. The consciousness arising from the semantic interpretation of the male-gender-marked language used by the Bible teacher earlier referred to in the discussion is what triggered off the protest by the ‘daughters of the church’ against being excluded from the “kingdom of God”. They saw the language as ‘man-made’, carrying the nuance of linguistic oppression. Realizing the power of language on the mind, it is clear that only gender free language which does not subscribe to established prejudices against the female sex, can change men’s ways of regarding women and make women conscious of the importance of language in their lives. Change of language use represents an outer change which affects the inner attitude. When a practice is changed, the social relationship is restructured, since language is a social activity. The new experience created, brings about the inner change which in turn automatically affects and changes the outer world. It changes the way humans speak, write, think about and relate with each other.

This is why this paper has used the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis to prove the powerful influence that language exerts on the mind. There are two points to note here. The first is that those women in the Bible class would never have protested if the KJV rendering of the quoted scriptures and the Bible teacher’s language had carried the semantic import of their inclusion in the “kingdom of God”. The second is that their protest led to a change in the language-use of the young Bible teacher in the remaining part of the class and henceforth.

CONCLUSION

Given the point that the Holy Bible has “entered, as no other book has, into the making of the personal character and the public institutions of the English speaking peoples”, the gender free language-use in the modern-day versions of the Holy Bible, arising from feminist consciousness, will certainly bring about change. This change will be manifested in the

mental attitude, beliefs and culture of the people as exemplified in the change in the language-use of the young Bible teacher.

Our attempt in this paper has been to call attention to this phenomenon of language-use when it to writing, teaching and preaching in the Christian scriptures and as an extension, to encourage feminist praxis to continue to pursue its fight against the problem of linguistic sexism on all fronts. Language exerts **power** on the **mind**, regulates the society and controls existence.

ENDNOTES

1. This observation is made in French in the following terms: “Le progrès du féminisme et l’évolution de la vie sociale créeront et ont créé déjà des forms féminines nouvelles...” The words given as examples in the text are those given in the above observation.
2. This is our own translation of the following French text “Le féminisme, ayant conquis l’accès à toutes les dignités ou fonctions jusque – là réservées à des hommes se plaît à conquérir aussi l’usage des appellations masculines correspondant à ces dignités ou fonctions (même dans le cas où la langue possède une forme féminine)”. The example given in the text after the above remark also comes from *Le Bon Usage*.
3. See for example Welch’s article titled “The Truth of Liberation Theory: Particulars of a Relative Sublime” in which she elaborates her theory of “A feminist theory of liberation” as a “poetics of revolution” for the ultimate liberation of the human race based on the eternal rejection of or resistance to oppression.
4. See their co-authored article titled “American Feminism and The Language of Control” published in *Feminism and Foucault: Reflections on Resistance*, jointly edited by them.
5. The expressions italicized are those to be compared in the different versions.
6. In the Foreword to the TEV, it is stated that this version of the Holy Bible “seeks to state clearly and accurately the meaning of the original texts in words and forms that are widely accepted by people who use English as a means of communication... it attempts to present Biblical content and message in standard, everyday, natural English”.
7. A contributor to *Merit Student’s Encyclopedia* has observed that earlier and present day feminists have used the language of liberation politics employed by the revolutionaries.
8. *Merit Student’s Encyclopedia* (1979) Vol. 6. Macmillan Educational Corporation, p.589.
9. ‘Efik’ as a tribe is located at the Southeastern tip of Nigeria. The language spoken by the ‘Efiks’ is called ‘Efik’.

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