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## LINGUISTIC INCLUSIVENESS AND EXCLUSIVENESS IN AKACHI EZEIGBO'S *HOUSE OF SYMBOLS AND CHILDREN OF THE EAGLE*

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### ABSTRACT

This article attempts to inquire into Ezeigbo's literary works viz. *House of Symbols* (henceforth *HS*) and *Children of the Eagle* (henceforth *COE*), with a view to finding out how the writer sounds inclusive or exclusive in her use of the English language. Actually, early scholarly linguistic and literary studies (Bodine, 1975; Strunk & White, 1979; Dooga, 2009) have proved that the use of gendered terms in connection with men signals an inappropriate use of language and displays male gender, sex-oriented. Through the analysis of the two novels, the paper has come to the conclusion that Ezeigbo has adopted, in her literary artifacts, an inclusive and politically correct language repertoire which is quite different from the sexist/exclusive language of the first generation writers.

**Keywords:** Akachi Ezeigbo, gender, politically correct language, inclusive language, sexist/exclusive language.

### RESUME

Cet article essaie d'analyser les romans de l'écrivaine Akachi Ezeigbo intitulés : *House of Symbols* (dorénavant *HS*) et *Children of the Eagle* (*COE*), afin de savoir dans quelle mesure elle inclut et exclut le genre masculin et féminin dans sa façon d'utiliser la langue anglaise. En effet, les récentes recherches littéraires et linguistiques (Bodine, 1975; Strunk & White, 1979; Dooga, 2009) ont montré que l'utilisation de certains termes en relation avec le genre masculin signale un usage inapproprié de la langue et affiche l'orientation masculine du genre. Mais à travers l'analyse des deux romans, l'article a conclu que Ezeigbo a adopté, dans ses œuvres littéraires, un langage inclusif et politiquement correct qui s'oppose au langage sexiste/exclusif de la première génération d'écrivains (es) africains (es).

**Mots-clés:** Akachi Ezeigbo, genre, langage politiquement correct, langage inclusif, langage sexiste/exclusif.

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### INTRODUCTION

By and large, feminism is conceptualized as a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and [male] oppression. In other words, it is an ideology

advocated to equal treatment between male and female sex. Ezeigbo, in an interview with Henry Akubuiro (2012) asserts that feminism, in African sense, is not aggression, quarrelling or fighting for

superiority – it just wants women to rise and be empowered. This feminist discourse is toned down in most of her literary works so much so that any non-attentive reader would believe that women's emancipation and independence are no longer a controversial issue in African societies.

Actually, the comments made by men about women's abilities are fallacious or asymmetrical with what appears in fiction. It is well known that in areas such as politics, army, medicine, business, academy, media, leadership, etc. men are granted primary statuses while most women occupy second/subordinate position. It is then clear that men cling to their supremacy/superiority and to their ideas of patriarchal dominance. This is why Njoku (2001:195) states that men use "the ideology of patriarchy which emphasizes male importance and superiority to enslave women and make them second class citizens."

Moreover, most of male writings portray women as non-assertive, less skilful and less intelligent (Koussouhon, 2009) with trivialized language repertoire. Alexander (1984:6) on this issue asserts: "Women, [men] say, are unreliable and irrational. They depend too little on cool reasoning and too much on intuition and instinct to arrive at decisions. They are not even capable of thinking clearly." From this assertion, it becomes obvious that in spite of their struggle for equality and fair treatments, women are still stereotyped by men. The explanation Lakoff (1975:75) finds for this is that "...women have not had too much influence on the affairs of the world because the term for this is *his-tory* [...] the problem could be solved by changing the world to *her-story*" (our emphasis). The writing of 'history' from the male point of view to the female inclusive perspective '*her-story*' reflects features of inclusiveness which clashes with the issue of political correctness discussed throughout the world.

This paper is, then, an attempt to discuss the issue of linguistic inclusiveness and exclusiveness in Akachi Ezeigbo's two novels. Before carrying out the analysis of this linguistic phenomenon followed by the

discussion, we have, first of all, embarked on the conceptual clarifications and theoretical orientation.

#### Conceptual clarifications and theoretical orientation

Let's start this section with the consideration of the linguistic word 'reference'. Though the article is not dealing with it per se, it seems irrefutable that it is a part of the concern here because while listening to a speech, a talk, a conversation or reading a book/an article, we expect the speaker or the characters to use pronouns to refer anaphorically or cataphorically back to some items/nouns previously mentioned or to ensure pronoun and antecedent agreement (Koussouhon & Amoussou, 2013). As such, Eggins (2004:33) suggests that 'reference' deals with "how the writer/speaker introduces participants and then keeps track of them once they are in the text." In this, a pronoun (he, she, it) or a demonstrative (this, that) may be used to refer to an individual/item in a preceding sentence (Fowler, 1986:62; Brown & Yule, 1983:28). Alongside the foregoing insights, Koussouhon and Amoussou (2013:207) hold the view according to which the pronoun set "he-him-his-his-himself" is used for human-male gender, "she-her-her-hers-herself" for the female one and "it-it-its-itself" for neuter, i.e., a thing or an animal, heedless of gender. The consideration of this rule is an objection to the generic 'he' which, to some extent, excludes females (Wolfson, 1989:165) and favors the use of a sexist/non-inclusive language. But with the advent of political correctness in the English language, the salient point of this syntactic and semantic discrepancy, in contemporary literary works, requires a linguistic investigation.

Actually, linguistic inclusiveness is a prominent language event in the field of applied linguistics; nonetheless, it has received scant attention from scholars investigating in this domain. Moreover, despite the political correctness campaigns all over the world, some writers (male and female alike) still divert from the rules of gender inclusiveness and adopt an exclusive/sexist language possibly to fit their artistic creativity which is associated with 'originality', 'expressiveness' or 'imaginativeness' (Ezeigbo, 2008:4).

Therefore, the term 'inclusiveness' is used to suggest an alternative non-sexist/exclusive use of the English language. In other words, it is a gender neutral way of using the language which includes pronouns and words that do not indicate one's gender. The introduction of this term in the field of linguistics poses the problem of language reform which is intended to end up sexism and promote the use of inclusive language. The latter clashes with the burning issue of political correctness which is coined to describe language, ideas, policies, or behaviours which do not unjustly place any group of people above others or do not discriminate any group against another.

The main argument pursued in this paper is the adoption or creation of alternative linguistic items – for example, 'Ms' as a title for all women, be they married or single; 'manager', 'spokesperson' and 'chairperson' to refer inclusively to both women and men; 'he or she' and 's/he' to avoid the 'masculine bias' of the 'generic he' (Sunderland, 2006:11). Today, one can read sentences like '**Nobody** should turn in **his/her** or **their** grave on account of me', which violates traditional rules of subject- verb agreement but conforms to the new rules of gender neutrality. In this perspective, Koussouhon and Amoussou (2013:31-32) think that:

Reference to the indefinite personal pronouns and noun phrases such as "somebody, someone, everybody, everyone, anybody, anyone, nobody, no one, any student, every candidate, any person, etc." should be made with the "they-them-their-theirs-themselves" pronoun set to avoid sexist language.

Moreover, general terms containing the segment 'man', such as '**mankind**', '**man-made**', etc. are made inclusive by using synonyms such as '**humankind**', '**artificial**', etc. From what has been thus said, we can argue that feminism activists uphold the principle of inclusiveness to being firmly committed to express the equality of genders. Under the same research guidelines, Koussouhon and Amoussou (2013:34) corroboratively assert that "Political

Correctness is part and parcel of the feminist struggle for parity."

The use of gender-inclusive language has also received particular attention within religious discourse. In this vein, Greene and Rubin (1991:82) contend "Currently, religious language in many mainstream denominations is undergoing significant changes. The changes are intended to reduce sexism and increase gender-inclusiveness." This is meant to represent women in a more positive and inclusive way because some years earlier, the clergy was divided on the issue of women priests/pastors. The use of inclusive language in religion is not without its opponents. It is noted a categorical rejection of the gender inclusive alternative 'Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer' as an 'inadequate substitute' for 'Father, Son and Holy Ghost' (Greene & Rubin, 1991; Thistlethwaite, 1985). Koussouhon and Amoussou (2013:47) share the same view when backing up their argumentation with quotations from the Holy Scriptures (e.g: Galatians 3:26, 28; Revelation 21:9; 1John 3:1, 2). Actually, it can be read:

...though the use of "He" and the attribute "Father" may lead to think of God as 'male' in gender, the Bible refutes this conception, reminding us through Apostle Paul that the use of male pronoun for God and other spirit creatures should not be taken literally: there is neither male nor female within their ranks when they become glorified spirit sons of God, as they are also described as 'the bride of the Lamb'

Many of the feminist campaigns are against the use of linguistic items such as the so-called 'generic he' and 'man' as this, not only causes people to 'think male' but it also degrades women (Sunderland, 2006:54; Miller and Swift, 1976/1989; Koussouhon, 2009a:19). This suggests the existence of language and culture as male-dominated and patriarchal. Conceptually, patriarchy, which emphasizes male superiority over female (Njoku, 2001), is an ideology that perpetrates the use of the sex-indefinite "he". The use of this pronoun can also be traced back to traditional prescriptive grammar and its corollary, the

endocentric pronominalisation (Koussouhoun & Amoussou, 2013:35). Greene & Robin (1991:3) corroborate and assert:

Prescriptive rules of traditional grammar in the English language, mandates the masculine pronoun if the referent is neuter, masculine, or multi-sexed. Generic pronouns (e.g. 'he', 'his', 'him', and 'himself') are claimed to refer with equal likelihood to women and men [...]. Conceptually and practically, this poses some problems for language users. A woman is labeled 'he' when the generic pronoun is used [...] and research shows that the generic masculine pronoun is likely to limit opportunities and affects self-concepts of women.

The above quotation is nothing but quite true because the presence of one man among any indefinite number of women is enough for the use of the male related pronoun "he", which make women feel shut out (Koussouhoun & Amoussou, 2013:34; Lakoff, 1973:75). It then becomes needless to remind that the term 'exclusiveness/linguistic exclusiveness' is used to mean linguistic features used to refer only to men or women.

#### Linguistic inclusiveness and exclusiveness in *HS*

Throughout the novel, there are quite a number of sentences used by male and female characters and the narrator herself in which a careful reader can identify instances of gender inclusiveness and exclusiveness. A few cases of them are quoted here for analysis and discussion.

- 1) "The overall success of a visit depends on whether the **seeker** or **visitor** has gained thorough and complete knowledge of the problem that led **him** or **her** to the prophethood." (p.36)
- 2) "I heal the **sick** with herbal broths which I prepare specially for **them**." (p.42)
- 3) "**Man** and **Woman** are two sides of **Chukwu** at the point of creation. Hence, **Chukwu** is both **Father** and **Mother**. The two rolled into one." (p.47)
- 4) "Here, **one** discovers that **one's** journey on this side of existence can be reinvigorated with visions

of self-remembrance and other remembrances." (p.51)

- 5) "Some people say the harmattan is a season God created as an afterthought.....to punish **humankind** for trying to reach the sky..." (p.106)
- 6) "The load a **child** lifts on to **his** or **her** head cannot be too heavy for the child to carry..." (p.110)
- 7) "What do you do when a **friend** or a **relation** or even **someone** who has neither of these claims on you but wants to identify with you or draw close to you gives you **his** or **her** child [...]" (p.120)
- 8) "...there is no perfectly happy or contented **human being** in the whole world and that if there is such a **person**, **he** or **she** has not yet been born." (p.129)
- 9) "Sometimes **one** finds **oneself** wondering what this life is all about and what living amounts to." (p.130)
- 10) "The only means of escape is if the **dreamer** wakes up **himself** or **herself** or is fortunate enough to have someone near enough to wake **him** or **her**." (p.261)
- 11) "It is true that in business **everyone** takes care of **himself** or **herself**, but competition can and should be healthy..." (p.263)
- 12) "... **no one** can move about the house or compound without wondering if a stone will land on **his** or **her** head in the next second." (p.310)
- 13) "They know that when government owes **one's** money, **one** will receive it even if **one** has to wait for a while, provided, of course, that **one** does not collapse and die during the waiting." (p.313)
- 14) "...the journey may be interrupted somewhere, at some point along the path that terminates in the valley so that **the traveller** pulls back just in time to return the way **he** or **she** had come..." (p.376)
- 15) "My friend, tell me **whom** this world is a bed of roses and I will genuflect before **him** or **her**." (p.383)

All the examples mentioned above, that is (1)-(15), are true instances of the use of inclusive, non-sexist language in which both sexes are taken into, thereby rejecting the generic **he** to exclude one gender in favor of another one. The most surprising example of these

utterances is (3) where Ezenwayi, the prophetess, finds that Chukwu (God) is both male and female. This is to say that God is genderless, a way to answer those who call God “**their Father**”. This female character is taking these concepts from her own point of view because not only is she a woman but she is also a prophetess. This is an ideological point of view which simply means “the system of beliefs, values, and categories by reference to which a person or a society comprehends the world” (Fowler, 1981:131). The prophetess’ explanation of God certainly yields a conflicting or contrasting point of view between her addressee and herself since she has been too generic in her argumentation. For sure, there exists, here, an indication that the way a person expresses himself/herself determines his/her personality. The prophetess’ language is then idiosyncratic. However, the utterances below prove to be sexist, exclusive/non-inclusive language use, which excludes males and/or females:

- 16) “When **a child** knows that **his** father or mother is standing right behind **him**, then **he** steps forward with courage and with confidence.” (p.267)
- 17) “It is said that when a **child** eats the thing that kept **her** awake, sleep carries **her** off without difficulty so that **her** mother can have some peace.” (p.314)
- 18) “A **person** who holds something that belongs to a child high up above **his** head will get tired, develops a persistent pain in **his** arm so that **he** will not wait to be told to return the thing to the child, the rightful owner.” (p.349)

As noted above, in this novel of more than four hundred pages, only three cases of the use of exclusive/sexist language have been noted. Table 1 below explains the intention behind the use of the gendered/exclusive language and offers alternatives of it.

**Table1:** Explanation and alternatives of the intention behind the use of the gendered/exclusive language in *HS*.

| Examples of sexist/gendered usage   | Possible explanation   | Alternatives   |
|---|--|--|
| When a <b>child</b> knows that <b>his</b> father or mother is standing right behind <b>him</b> , then <b>he</b> steps forward with courage.....   | Defines only male children as being courageous   | When a <b>child</b> knows that <b>his/her</b> father or mother is standing right behind <b>him/her</b> , then <b>s/he</b> steps forward with courage.....  |
| It is said that when a <b>child</b> eats the thing that kept <b>her</b> awake, sleep carries <b>her</b> off without difficulty so that <b>her</b> mother can have some peace.   | This means that child minding is exclusively women’s job   | It is said that when a <b>child</b> eats the thing that kept <b>her/him</b> awake, sleep carries <b>her/him</b> off without difficulty so that <b>her/his</b> mother can have some peace.  |
| A <b>person</b> who holds something that belongs to a child high up above <b>his</b> head will get tired; develops a persistent pain in <b>his</b> arm so that <b>he</b> will not wait to be told to return the thing to the child..... | Implies that power or strength or muscular activities are exclusively abilities displayed by men | A <b>person</b> who holds something that belongs to a child high up above <b>his/her</b> head will get tired, develop a persistent pain in <b>his/her</b> arm so that <b>s/he</b> will not wait to be told to return the thing to the child..... |

**Linguistic inclusiveness and exclusiveness in COE**

As in the first novel, a perusal of *COE* also reveals an important use of exclusive/sexist language. Below are some examples:

- 19) “If you find **people** at all in the houses.....they are old **men** and **women** like me....” (p.7)
- 20) “....If **the other parent** is honest; the child could take after **him** or **her**.” (p.27)

- 21) "As I have said many times, my children, it is only **a fool** who tells the world the whole truth about **himself** or **herself**." (p.46)
- 22) "On her part, Nnemme's ordeal taught her that no one could force **another** to eat what **he** or **she** does not want to eat." (p.84)
- 23) "Women have a spiritual role to play in salvaging **humankind**." (p.88)
- 24) "My communication channel with **Almighty** is open twenty-four hours. That I have my sanity today is a result of this contact with **God**, who is **Father** and **Mother** to me." (p.107)
- 25) "Our faith advocates that **an individual** must accept responsibility for **his** or **her** misdeeds or stupidities and then seek divine forgiveness....." (p.108)
- 26) "**The traditional oral artist** was self-effacing and did not claim ownership of the story **he** or **she** told. Not owing or claiming the story meant **he** or **she** did not indulge in a bizarre attempt to be different from others in the same profession, to infect the story with **his** or **her** ego." (p.135)
- 27) "**Nobody** should turn in **his** or **her** grave on account of me" (p.151)
- 28) "**One** saves **oneself** from the consequences by not voicing the thought" (p.172)
- 29) "If you brought a **guest**, there is a chair for **him** or **her**" (p.258)
- 30) "Why should **someone** be forced to accept what **he** or **she** does not want?" (p.281)

The use of inclusive language as noted in the above utterances is a proof that Akachi Ezeigbo has sided with the American and European feminists in their fight against one gender representation in fiction as many male authors did in the past. The most outstanding example is (24) where Almighty/God is masculine and feminine as well. This suggests that God is gender neutral/genderless in all "his/her" form. Here again, like in **HS**, the gender neutral representation of God is conceived from the point of view Obioma (a woman) who is a pastor. Up to now, only female characters have found the necessity to make God gender neutral because one can notice that women are excluded whenever this name is called.

Other cases of outstanding uses of inclusive language are found in sentences like (23) with the use of "humankind" instead of "mankind" used some years earlier before the burning issue of political correctness surfaces and in (28) with the use of the pronoun chain "one-oneself". This denotes, in the use of language, a shift from phallogocentric perspective to human-centred perspective.

From the analysis of these utterances, it is then possible to assume that in the novel, women struggle for equal and same position in the society so as to be present in every domain. In Nigeria, for example, the National Anthem calls all compatriots "to serve the Fatherland", consequently excluding all the Nigerian valuable women from nation building. But, Akachi Ezeigbo corrects this injustice by coining the word "Motherland" as in the following examples:

- 31) ".....Today is the day we bestow the greatest honour on **our ancestors**, the Obuofu, who lived and died for our **fatherland**...." (p.260)
- 32) "And **motherland**", a female voice calls from the back. (p.260)

This suggests that the nation building is both males' and females' affairs. It unveils how gender complementarities should be understood for the good of the society in which men and women are called to live in peace. By the use of these inclusive language patterns, Ezeigbo certainly aims at upholding female potentialities which patriarchy has repressed.

Nonetheless, the investigation into male-female discourse has also revealed that some utterances by the narrator and the different protagonists in the novel have diverted from the rules above. Here are some examples:

- 33) "The children made all the plans, surprising her with her pre-knowledge like **a person** given beautiful present when **she** least expects." (p.5)
- 34) "All the **young men** have fled the town to the cities, even those who do not have any meaningful jobs, trades or business there." (p.7)
- 35) "Memory is an important arsenal to **the storyteller**, an indispensable storehouse of knowledge. There, **the storyteller** stores **her** weapons of ideas, words and images. A writer's

- third's eye is memory. When *she* loses *her* memory, a *writer* descends into the abyss of nothingness....." (p.62)
- 36) ".....the **one** who lacks courage to speak to a king should cover *his* face with a hat before doing so."(p.87)
- 37) "**Anyone** who thinks that way should have *his* head examined."(p.97)
- 38) "**A spectator** does not stand on one spot to watch a dancing masquerade if *he* really wants to see well." (p.118)
- 39) It is **the child** that plays with fire that gets *his* fingers burnt."(p.199)
- Here again, as carried out in the first table above, we offer, in table 2, a possible explanation of the use of exclusive language by the narrator and suggest some alternatives to avoid sounding exclusive and abide by the new rules of political correctness.

**Table2:** Explanation and alternatives of the intention behind the use of the gendered/exclusive language in *COE*.

| Examples of sexist/gendered usage   | Possible explanation   | Alternatives  |
|---|--|---|
| The children made all the plans, surprising her with her pre-knowledge like <b>a person</b> given beautiful present when <i>she</i> least expects.  | Defines <i>person</i> exclusively as female-oriented                                   | The children made all the plans, surprising her with her pre-knowledge like <b>a person</b> given beautiful present when <i>s/he</i> least expects.   |
| All the <b>young men</b> have fled the town to the cities, even those who do not have any meaningful jobs, trades or business there.  | Assumes that only male gender is fit for the jobs, trades or businesses in the cities. | All the <b>young men and women</b> have fled the town to the cities, even those who do not have any meaningful jobs, trades .....   |
| Memory is an important arsenal to <b>the storyteller</b> , ... There, <b>the storyteller</b> stores <i>her</i> weapons of ideas, words and images. A writer's third's eye is memory. When <i>she</i> loses <i>her</i> memory, a <i>writer</i> descends into the abyss of nothingness..... | Defines storytelling and writing as activities exclusively female-oriented.            | Memory is an important arsenal to <b>the storyteller</b> ,..... There, <b>the storyteller</b> stores <i>his/her</i> weapons of ideas, words and images. A writer's third's eye is memory. When <i>s/he</i> loses <i>his/her</i> memory, a <i>writer</i> descends into the abyss of nothingness..... |
| .....the <b>one</b> who lacks courage to speak to a king should cover <i>his</i> face with a hat before doing so.   | Stereotypes men as lacking courage.  | .....the <b>one</b> who lacks courage to speak to a king should cover <i>his/her</i> face with a hat before doing so.   |
| <b>Anyone</b> who thinks that way should have <i>his</i> head examined  | Assumes that men most of the times think wrongly.                                      | <b>Anyone</b> who thinks that way should have <i>his/her</i> head examined  |
| <b>A spectator</b> does not stand on one spot to watch a  | Means that dancing masquerade are always   | <b>A spectator</b> does not stand on one spot to watch a dancing masquerade   |

|   |                                   |   |
|---|-----------------------------------|---|
| dancing masquerade if <b>he</b> really wants to see well.                       | followed and watched only by men. | if <b>s/he</b> really wants to see well   |
| It is <b>the child</b> that plays with fire that gets <b>his</b> fingers burnt. | Applies gender irrelevantly.      | It is <b>the child</b> that plays with fire that gets <b>his/her</b> fingers burnt. |

**Discussion**

The foregoing analysis allows us, here, to launch a discussion of the different findings. The interest of this lies in the possibility it gives to make a quantitative analysis of the results in order to check out the overarching point de depart of our investigation which argues that the narrator mostly makes use of an inclusive language repertoire to avoid being exclusive/sexist and to abide by the new rules of political correctness. For clarity's sake, the results of our different investigation are summarized in table 3 below.

**Table 3:** Statistics of inclusive and exclusive language in the selected passages of *HS* and *COE*

|                               | <i>HS</i> | %      | <i>COE</i> | %      |
|-------------------------------|-----------|--------|------------|--------|
| <b>Inclusive usage</b>        | 15        | 83.33% | 14         | 66.66% |
| <b>Exclusive/sexist usage</b> | 03        | 16.67% | 07         | 33.34% |
| <b>Total</b>                  | 18        | 100%   | 21         | 100%   |

As shown in the table above, eighteen (18) utterances have been culled from *HS*, which accounts for an inclusive and exclusive mode of discourse. Out of the eighteen utterances, only three (03) have to do with an exclusive/sexist language usage. As for *COE*, 21 cases of utterances accounting for the use of inclusive and exclusive language whereby seven (07) cases of exclusive/sexist use of language have been noted. In both cases, it has been noted that the uses of inclusive language are predominant. This is a proof that Akachi Ezeigbo sided with the worldwide feminist approach which, in one way or the other, struggles to end sexist way of using language in fiction. The rate of inclusive language seems to reflect the effort of the novelist to involve both male and female in her discourse. This is a way to prove, as shown in the utterances above, that "seeker", "visitor", "sick", "child", "friend/relation", "traveler", "dreamer", "no one", "everyone", "fool", "individual", "guest", "traditional oral artist", etc. can be both male and

female characters and thus select the third person pronoun "s/he" or "they". Where the sex of the interlocutor is not known, "one" and "oneself" as in (9) and (28) are selected. We can then assume that gender inclusiveness is certainly part and parcel of feminist struggle. It is also possible to assert that the narrator opts for the pedagogy of human-centered perspective so as to offer more visibility to women in contemporary female writers' fiction.

Through utterances (3) and (24), the narrator sets out a controversy: God is nowadays beyond God "*My Father*" in Heaven. It is also God "*My Mother*" in Heaven to solve the controversial sexist views of God. But it seems to the best of our knowledge that women have not yet registered significant achievements in this domain.

On the issue Ogunidipe-Leslie (1994:185) contends:

Needless to say the institutionalized sexism of the church, like the suppression of women through theology, their exclusion from ministry, the exclusive language of the liturgy and religious texts, and the exclusion of women from leadership and decision-making must engage African women in the churches while the churches themselves must come to own the Decade, which is still mainly a women's Decade.

From this assertion, it seems that removing sexism from churches remains a challenge at every clerical level because of priests'/pastors' God-given authority over women who are still kept at the subordinate position. Men have not yet understood that priesthood or pastorate is for everybody (men and women as well), not only for men.

Even though Ezeigbo's fictional works highlights aspects of gender inclusiveness, her inclination/tendency towards the use of exclusive/sexist mode of discourse, in spite of the

upsurge of feminism, remains controversial. Recently, many scholars have blamed male writers for having excluded women from their fiction by the use of the generic "he" to designate both genders. Ezeigbo, here, has fallen into the trap of what feminists reproach other people with. Simpson (1993:147) has then been right to observe, "Sexism is encoded into language, either consciously or unconsciously, by users of language." In the light of the same research guidelines, Koussouhon, A. L., Akogbeto, P. A. & Allagbe, A. A. (2015:315) contend that

.....the use of generic pronouns to designate both sexes/genders in a given context or the use of such lexical items as powerful/powerless, assertive/submissive, independent/dependent, violent/non-violent, perpetrator/victim, etc., to mark stereotypical societal schisms between them, simply denotes an established asymmetry in the language system, which invariably enhances the gender rifts in literature and society. In this sense, the use of language in the pioneering male fiction to represent the male sex/gender without regard for the female one can be contended to be gender-biased or simply sexist.

The above pronouncements show that the use of exclusive language is really discriminatory and stereotypical, which raises a number of surprising asymmetries in the representation of gender. The narrator knows quite well that "child" in (16) and (17) may be either male or female but selects different pronouns to refer back to it. Likewise "person" in (18) can be either male or female and should select "s/he". These three utterances simply denote sexist mode of discourse. For example, in (16) the use of the lexical items "courage" and "confidence" implies that only men can display these features. Likewise in (18), the use of the expressions "holds something.....high up", "persistent pain in.....arm" are meant to exclude women and leads us to conclude that the display of physical features or muscular pain is not female. Utterance (17) offers a troublesome and disappointing syntactic flaw which may inconvenience readers in

many ways. Though this is a proverb, the writer has consciously or unconsciously dropped the masculine third person pronoun "he" and opted for the use of "she", which is totally a female-oriented mode of discourse. We then suggest that the narrator should have resorted to the rules of political correctness to make this proverbial sentence inclusive to avoid sounding sexist.

Utterances (33) and (35) culled from *COE* also unveil a female-oriented mode of discourse. We notice that the narrator uses "he" to refer back to "person" in (18) whereas for the same lexical item, she selects "she" in (33), which may be very embarrassing like the case in (35) with the use of the chain "she-her-her" to refer back to "storyteller" and "writer". Taking into account these lexico-syntactic violations, we assume that the narrator makes use of the woman-centered mode of discourse depending on the targeted audience. For example, "person" in (33) is used to refer to the narrator's mother, a woman around whom most of her narration is built. Likewise, the use of the exclusive chain "she-her-her" in (35) shows that women happen to be the only ones who hold storytelling/writing skills different from men's in the arena of "storytelling" and "writing". We then argue that Ezeigbo pretentiously and unfailingly shows women are the best story-tellers and custodians of their societies' tradition. From the foregoing discussion, we assert a) that the use of the woman-centered mode of discourse is a rhetorical device which contests, confronts and demolishes the culture of patriarchy; b) that the writer's gender greatly impinges on her narrative discourse, which breaks with the formalistic aspect of the narrative technique which turns to be accommodative. The emergence of this reality in the African literature tends to subordinate the writing process to the pleasures, prejudices and the ideological and pedagogic intentions of the writer as a woman (Adjei, 2013).

Apart from the use of woman-centered mode of discourse our investigation has thus far revealed, we also notice the use of male-centered discourses as shown in (34), (36), (37), (38) and (39). What appears disappointing in these utterances is that the narrator

seems to be fault-finding the male gender. The use of “young men” in (34) is a stereotypical way of proving that rural/urban migration which makes headlines in most media all over the world, concern only men. We duly suggest here an inclusive language pattern because many of the young people whose life is daily slain in the Mediterranean Sea and the desert of Sahara are men as well as women. Moreover, the use of the chain “one-king-his” in the proverbial utterance (36) is a metaphor which is used by Nnenne to teach her rural fellow-women how to deal with sex issues with their husbands without being vulgar. But the “non-dit” behind this utterance is the presentation of men as lacking courage to speak to their Obas (Kings), the same way women lack courage to act themselves but they are just acted upon during sexual act. Here again, we suggest the use of an inclusive language to avoid being gender- biased or sexist language like those features identified in (37), (38) and (39) where the repetition of “anyone-his”, “a spectator-he”, and “the child-his” systematically excludes women and profusely stereotypes and disregards the male gender.

#### CONCLUSION

The present paper has dealt with a perusal of Ezeigbo’s use of fictional language in order to see how the narrator sounds inclusive in her use of the English language. Our investigation has shown that the novelist has adopted a politically correct language in her fiction. Moreover, we have also come to notice that for the sake of gender equity, Ezeigbo provides a subsequent gender inclusive religious discourse to eliminate constant masculine reference to God which, incontestably, excludes women at all level of liturgy. Nonetheless, the use of exclusive/sexist language shows that either the narrator’s sex impinges on her fictional narration or she is still influenced by Prescriptive Linguistics. But a final point needs to be made here. Taking into account the new rules of politically correct language, we think that modern writers should avoid the use of exclusive/sexist language which contemporary readers may certainly view as syntactic violations.

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