

Gender Inequality and Language Reflections in African Indigenous Languages: Comparative Cases from IsiZulu and Kiswahili

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Abstract

‘A movie starring Ben Stiller, got laughs nationwide for presenting a main character, who was a male nurse. The fact that a male pursuing a career in nursing still seems laughable shows how ingrained some gender roles still are’ (Herzfeld & Hamburg 2000). Using Bonilla-Silver’s (2006) framework, which has four components but in this particular study only three components will be considered: naturalization, minimization, and culture will be applied, authors have adopted the documentary research method to discuss and reflect on gender inequality in IsiZulu and Kiswahili as African indigenous languages. Also, the paper discusses how IsiZulu and Kiswahili languages enhance such inequality through words or phrases. The paper concludes with recommendations for reducing if not entirely eradicating gender inequalities in both languages. The paper advances that the desired change among members of society can only take place through provision of adequate knowledge and information. This in turn might help females and males to be persuaded, motivated and inspired to engage in cultural and social principles that enhance gender equalities. Thus, the method and messages of enhancing gender equality among female(s) and male(s) are of utmost importance.

Keywords: Gender Inequality, Indigenous African languages, IsiZulu, Kiswahili, Social and cultural norms.

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Zomdabu Zase-Afrika: Kughathaniswa IsiZulu neKiswahili**

Isifingqo

'Ingqayi eqhakambisa uBen Stiller, yahlekwa izwe lonke ngokwethula umlingisi osemqoka, owayewunesi wesilisa. Iqiniso elithi owesilisa osebenza njengonesi kubengathi usahlekwa namanje kukhombisa ukuthi kusagxilwe kanjani ngeqhaza okufanele libanjwe ubulili obuthile' (Herzfeld, & Hamburg 2000). Ukusebenzisa uhloko lukaBonilla-Silver (2006), olunezingxenye ezine kodwa kulolu cwaningo kuzosetshenziswa ezintathu kuphela: ukujwayeza, ukunciphisa, kanye namasiko zizosetshenziswa, ababhali bathatha izindlela zokucwaninga ngamadokhumentari (uMogalakwe 2006) ukudingida nokubuka ukungalingani kobulili esiZulwini nakuKiswahili njengezilimi zendabuko zama-Afrika. Futhi, iphepha lidingida ukuthi isiZulu neKiswahili kukuqinisa kanjani ukungalingani ngokusebenzisa amagama kanye namabinzana. Leli phepha liphetha ngezinto zokuthi kuncishiswe noma kuqedwe nya ukungalingani ngokobulili kuzo zombili izilimi. Leli phepha libeka phambili ukuthi izinguquko ezidingakalayo zingenzeka ngokuba khona kolwazi olwanele. Lokhu kungasiza bobabili abesilisa nabesifazane ukuba banxenxwe, bagqugquzelwe, bakhuthazwe ukuba bazibandakanye enqubeni yamasiko nenhlalo okuqinisa ukulingana ngokobulili. Ngakho, indlela nemibiko okuqinisa ukulingana ngokobulili phakathi kwabesilisa nabesifazane kusemqoka kakhulu.

Introduction

Sociolinguistics and discourse analytical literature on issues of gender and language in relation to African contexts remain scarce or infrequently achieve international circulation (Atanga *et al.* 2012). The fact that empirical studies of language and gender have to date been undertaken largely in parts of the United States of America, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Europe is deemed to be an indictment on African scholars (cf. Atanga *et al.* 2012). The lack of research funding has been identified as a stumbling block for many African academics in carrying out research on issues of gender, language and

inequality. In addition to this, Makoni and Meinhof (2004) argue that much of our systematic knowledge of African societies is derived from and continues to be produced by western sources. This situation has its background from colonialism, whereby African indigenous knowledge systems and languages were systematically undermined so as to erase African contributions to history and knowledge production. This fact notwithstanding, academicians can change this trend by enhancing both field and documentary research methods in the area of African indigenous knowledge systems. For the purposes of this article, literature on gender, language, and inequality was studied and this provided the basis for the analysis of gender inequality that is evident in African indigenous languages with Kiswahili and isiZulu as cases in point.

Design, Method of Data Collection and Analysis

Research Framework: Bonilla-Silver's Framework

The article uses Bonilla-Silver's framework (2006). Although this framework has four components, the authors chose to apply only three of these, namely, naturalization, minimization, and culture. The following is an explication of these components. The first component is *naturalization which*, according to the framework, entails situations where women or wives give a high level of respect to their husbands or men, but in many incidents, men or husbands do not give back the same respect to wives or women (Bonilla-Silver 2006). The second component is *minimization which* concerns the situation where women tend to minimise the impacts of gender inequalities on them by thinking that they are not respected or given a chance to practice their freedom because they are women. The third and final component is *culture* which, according to this framework, has to do with inherent assumption that gender inequalities continue in Africa because of cultural ideologies.

Data Collection: Documentary

The authors of this article adopted the documentary research method (Mogalakwe 2006). This method focuses on the analysis of documents containing information on the phenomena of interest to the researcher (Bailey, 1994). Although this method is not common in the social sciences

(Mogalakwe 2006), it provides useful tools in categorizing , investigating , interpreting and identifying the limitations of physical sources whether in the private or public domain (Payne & Payne 2004). In terms of data analysis and the interpretation of the findings, the authors applied Bonilla-Silver's framework (2006) components in analysing gender inequalities in the IsiZulu and Kiswahili languages. More specifically, the authors elaborated and showed how naturalization, minimization and culture as critical components are the factors that enhance gender inequalities in both languages.

Review of Related Literature

Gender and Gender Inequality

Whilst Merriam-Webster's online dictionary defines gender as the state of being male or female, Njogu & Orchardson-Mazruri (2006) define gender inequality as unequal treatment or perceptions of individuals based on their gender. Gender inequality 'arises from differences in socially constructed gender roles as well as biologically through chromosomes, brain structure, and hormonal differences'. Njogu and Orchardson-Mazruri (2006) further argue that gender inequality is not occurring or planted only through socialization or biologically but also derives from the glaring gaps in policy, legal frameworks, education, and investment opportunities that lead to the creation of difficulties for women towards performing to their full potential in social, economic and political spheres as active members of the society.

Language and Gender Inequality

Language, Communication and Culture

Buthelezi (2004) argues in Steinberg's (1994) terms that language is a translation of what is in the human minds and that in their minds, human beings conceptualize the world according to how they have experienced it. This type of conceptualization renders the world translatable into language. This simplifies the process of communication between the speaker and hearer and makes language a main medium of communication. Additionally, Buthelezi (2004), in Southerland and Katamba's (1996) terms, asserts that there are two views which account for gender differences. One is the

sociolinguist's view that gender differences in language are simply a reflection of the way society works. And, the other is the feminist's view that language serves as a primary means of encoding ideas used in constructing and maintaining that society. It is thus argued that in enhancing communication through verbal, written or sign language, the speaker presents his/her feelings, thoughts or insights to the hearer. Therefore, when people use language to communicate, they share their own individual perspectives of the world and as Klopper (1999) argues, 'communication is a meeting of minds'. In many languages, words are culture-specific and they have language-specific meanings which reflect the cultural experiences of the people who speak that particular language (Dirven & Verspoor 1998:145). According to Buthelezi (2003:28), language being one vehicle for identifying formation and cultural construction should then be used effectively to create a context for learners to see their beliefs in perspective and to discuss the implications of the things they think about males and females.

In his discussion of the relationship between culture and language, Raymond (2000) argues that if culture is the main determinant of human attitudes, tastes and mores, then language is the central feature of culture. This is due to the fact that it is through language that culture is transmitted, interpreted and configured. According to Raymond, language is also a register of culture as historically, the trajectory of a culture can be read in the language and the evolution of its lexicals and morphology. Pitso (2008) asserts that what differentiates human beings from other animals is their ability to create culture. It is culture that raises human beings above the rest of nature, beyond instinct, and relies on nurture for their enlightenment. Gender, therefore, ends up being embedded in all institutions, actions, beliefs and desires that go along with the mapping of language use through communication, interaction, and establishment of the social order (Shitemi 2009:3). Similarly, Shitemi (2009) argues that all people are pervasive images of ideologized male and female differentiation not only practically but also linguistically. As a result, the concept of gender inequality is enhanced. In this process, language is the most important means of human intercourse including gender ideologies.

Prewitt-Freilino *et al.* (2011:268) argue, in Boroditsky (2009) terms, that feminists have long argued that sexist language which is defined as words, phrases or even sentences that undermine members of either gender or that needlessly emphasizes on gender can have real world consequences for

gender relations and relative status of men and women. Boroditsky (2009) thus suggests that language not only reflects the conversations of the culture and particularly patterns of thought, but also systems of language can actually shape people's cognitive understanding of their world. This idea is corroborated by Prewitt-Freilino *et al.* (2011:281) quoting Mrtyna (1980) in their argument that gendered language can have an impact on people's social judgements, decisions, and behavior and that many have begun to rally behind the idea that change in language is needed to curb social inequalities in society. It is in this light, therefore, that Prewitt-Freilino *et al.* (2011:281) argue that to understand the intersection of gender in connection to language, cognition, and culture, researchers should draw connections between large-scale cross-cultural trends, cognitive process models and experimental researches on interpersonal behavior.

Language and Gender

Language is the key instrument and medium by which gender ideologies are constructed, perpetuated and propagated. Gender ideologies differ with respect to the nature of males and females; justice's naturalness, origins and necessities of various aspects of the gender order; on whether difference is fundamental, whether it should be maintained, and whether it can/or should be maintained without inequality' (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 2005:35). Notably, therefore, language has both benefits and limitations to the people who use it as it is a key tool in expressing and analysing gender ideologies.

It is thus arguable that despite the benefits that accrue from language, it also enhances gender inequalities. This is seen through some words or phrases in various languages all over the world and Kiswahili and IsiZulu as cases in point. Prewitt-Freilino *et al.* (2011) argue that as long as language exists, the distinction between male and female is unavoidable. These authors further argue that there is no language that does not distinguish between genders at all. In this light, Stahlberg *et al.* (2007:163) argue that gender may fundamentally be important to 'social organization and social structure such that linguistic means are rendered indispensable for speech communities' (Shitemi 2000:3). Buthelezi (2004:388) argues that a different language represents a different view of life. Also, language is an attribute of culture and reflects the inequalities of power between men and women which exists

within particular society (Buthelezi 2004:145). These gender inequalities are also enhanced by gender stereotypes that ignore the concept of gender equality because they emphasize on the dominance of men over women. Members of the society use these stereotypes or assumptions to conceptualize men's and women's gender roles in the society.

Kiswahili and IsiZulu Words and Phrases which Show Gender Inequalities

There are many words/phrases that are gendered in the Kiswahili and IsiZulu languages. These words have different meanings and are applied differently to both genders.

Kiswahili

Oa/olewa (marry/get married)

These two Kiswahili words mean 'to get married' in the English language. However, in Kiswahili, the word 'oa' is reserved to be used by men only, because only a man in Swahili culture marries. When the concept of marriage is referred to a woman, the verb 'oa' should always be in the passive 'olewa' (be married). What is implied here is that, marriage is a single directional issue in that a man marries a woman after paying the bride price to his wife's family. In this case, a woman is seen as an object bought by a man from her family. So, a woman enters marriage knowing that there is no equality in it since she has only been 'married'. Thus, it is inferred from this linguistic pattern that if a man is referred to as 'ameolewa' there are two connotations which arise. Firstly, the man is dependent on and dominated by his wife which is something that is seen as a shame. In Swahili culture, a man cannot be dominated by a woman. This situation arises when a man does not have a job or his income is smaller than his wife to the extent that he entirely depends on his wife for his subsistence. Secondly, a man is referred as 'ameolewa' if he moves to the home of the wife after marriage. All these situations emphasise the idea that a man cannot be dependent on a woman.

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Another instance when a man is referred to as ‘*ameolewa*’ is when he is a gay. So, if a man is referred to as ‘*ameolewa*’ it could directly mean that he is a gay. In the Swahili culture homosexuality is not accepted. So, men who are gay face very serious discrimination against them.

Bwana/bibi:

Bibi and *bwana* in the Kiswahili language context are the inverse of the English word order. They are mutually interchangeable depending on the context of use. The same applies to *mke* (wife) na *mme* (husband), which is the conversational stand point in opposition to *mume* na *mke* (Shitemi 2000). In more specific terms, whilst the word ‘*bwana*’ simply means gentleman, boss, sir, lord, master, and mister; *bibi* means ‘*madam*’, ‘*Mrs*’ or *miss*.’ In some incidents, *bibi* could mean grandmother, which does not connote any gender inferiority. *Bwana* is just used to address a man and women are addressed using *bibi* which could mean ‘*madam*’ or *mrs* someone’. When *bwana* is used to address men, there is a sense of a high level of respect contrary to the use of *bibi*. Although *bibi* should mean a high level of respect to this woman so addressed it is unfortunately just a word. You could hear people saying *bwana* na (and) *bibi* John (in short Bw. & Bi John meaning Mr. & Mrs. John. But when *bibi* is used alone, it is not stronger than *bwana*.

Mwanamke (a woman/female) *Pambo la Nyumba:*

Mwanamke ni pambo la nyumba (a woman/female is a decorator of the house)

A woman is seen as an object to beautify or decorate her family’s home. She is married to make a home attractive. This is reflected on the daily chores an average woman or even a girl is required to perform such as cleaning the house, washing the clothes of the husband and children and making sure that the compound remains tidy. This situation is also depicted in a poem titled ‘A Poem about School’ written by a schoolgirl, Miss Majangira, a form 3 (grade Eleven - high school) student and it is cited by Tegissa (1990), a teacher by profession and also head teacher of Jangwani Secondary School located in Dar es Salaam Tanzania. Tegissa explains that the attitudes of her female students are depicted on the poem as follows:

A Poem about School

A bag full of books on her shoulder'
Early in the morning she hurries to school
She catches a bus to school
She reaches school very late
The teacher gives her a punishment
Why she is late?

In the school
She studies all subjects by heart
When the time comes to go home
She remains at school and studies very hard
When the examinations come
She passes.

In the evening she arrives home late
Her father beats her
He asks her, 'Why are you late'
When she wants to explain
Her father beats her again
She tells her father
'Dear my father, I was studying at school.'
Her father asks her 'were you studying about men?'
The girl cries loudly
Her mother comes to see
Why her daughter cries
When she asks the father
He beats her also.
The next morning
The girl gets up and washes her body
She goes to school
Then the bell rings, she hurries home
She arrives home early her father is happy

At home she works very hard
No time to study
When the exams come

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She fails all the subjects
Her father beats her why does she fail?
Oh, poor girl, what will she do?

Look at the school boy
He goes to school early
When the time comes to go home
He remains at school
He passed exams
When he goes home,
He reached there late
His father calls his daughter
He tells the daughter to give her brother food
The father doesn't beat him
Because he is a boy (Teggisa 1990:4).

The content of the poem above shows how even a girl is responsible for many family chores like their mothers (Mikell 1997: 194). Similarly, Kehler (2001:4) argues that South African black women perform multiple roles and are always at the center of reproduction and production in society. This shows that women are very committed to their families and their husbands which is the situation that might have created the inequality in the family. It is, therefore, not surprising that they are considered as decorators of their homes. Also, Ericson in his blog titled *Lazima uwe makini wakati wa kutafuta mke*, which literally translates as 'You must be careful when you are looking for a wife.' lists the following characteristics a good wife must possess:

1. Keeping the house clean (Anayejali usafi wa nyumba)
2. Respecting (Anayeheshimu)
3. Caring for her husband's relatives (Anayeheshimu Nasaba/ndugu ya/za mmewe)

Looking superficially at the three statements above, one could think that these are important qualities for a wife to have, but when deeply analysed, they all suggest that a wife is just a family instrument used in taking care of the members of the family, relatives, and the house.

Amepata jiko (He has got a cooker):

This phrase is used to describe a man who has just got married. It asserts that a man has got ‘a cooker’, which means a wife. The word *jiko* means ‘a cooker/stove/kitchen which reflects the image of a woman in a marriage. A wife is seen as a cooker, stove or a kitchen which is used to cook food for a man and the family. In this case, a woman’s main responsibility is to make sure that her husband eats well and properly. Thus, the place of a wife is in the kitchen. In fact, in some strict Swahili families, a wife is not even allowed to show up in a lounge where men sit to talk and eat. According to MacWilliam (1986:99), the phrase *amepata jiko* reinforces the conception of a ‘woman’ as a recipient.

Muongwana/waungwana:

The expression above refers to noble, kind and gentleman and is used for men only. You could hear people saying *John ni muungwana*, which means *John is a gentlemen* or a kind or a noble person. This term cannot be applied to a woman even if she possesses similar qualities. According to Bellagamba (2013), historically *muungwana/waungwana* referred to non-slaves; free people. During the slave trade era, these people were either Arabs or few Africans who had forged a bond with Arabs. *Waungwana* did not mix with other people who were considered to be slaves. The fact that the word ‘waungwana’ is not associated with women implies that women are not free. As such, they are slaves of men.

IsiZulu

The Department of Education (2002:18) as quoted in Buthelezi (2004) argues that one of the controls that society has over women’s lives is language which is the most important tool in perpetuating gender differences. Discussing IsiZulu language which is the most widely spoken of the Nguni languages in South Africa, Buthelezi (2004) argues that this language has words and expressions that convey sexist attitudes which not only reproduce but also maintain social stereotypes that lead to inequality between the male and female genders. She also asserts that even in relation to women, there are IsiZulu terms that categorise them with emphasis on social inequalities. These terms are discussed below by the authors of this article:

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Isoka- a man with many female lovers:

The word *Isoka*- according to Hunter (2005: 391) is an isiZulu word for a man with multiple sexual partners. Hunter (2005:391) is of the point that ‘in the nineteenth century KwaZulu-Natal multiple partners were not men’s sole prerogative and that unmarried women could also enjoy limited sexual relations with more than one boyfriend. In contrast, by the 1940s and 1950s most oral testimonies suggest that *umthetho* (the law) allowed only men to have multiple sexual partners’. An *Isoka* was sharply juxtaposed to an *isifebe*. This word refers to a man with many female lovers. It has a very positive connotation which is associated with celebrating the victory of a man with many girlfriends. The society embraces this word thus perpetuating men’s tendency of having multiple relationships. When this word is used, it describes a man who is known for his sexual prowess. Patriarchy, which refers to a society in which the men dominate, finds practical expression in Zulu societies. The Zulu people have promoted the use of such words and in other cases it is linked with the acceptable practice of polygamy. There is even a phrase in isiZulu which is associated with the practice of men when they approach females who may be their relatives as well as their lovers which says, ‘*Isoka lamanyala*’. Linked to the practice of polygamy is a situation where there are many wives that cannot be identified according to the relevant categories, for example, *undlunkulu* (principal wife), *ikhohlo* (second wife in the order of marriage) and *iqadi* (third wife). In such circumstances, the wives are called *amabibi*, an isiZulu word meaning inferior wives.

Isifebe/Isikhebeleshe- a woman who has many lovers:

The word *isifebe/isikhebeleshe* refers to a woman who allows any man to sleep with her. She uses her body to please men. The word *isifebe* originates from an isiZulu word *isikhebe* which refers to a large hole that is dug to entrap large game. In this instance, women are a hole and men are games. Another word which is closer to this is *unondindwa* meaning a woman who often changes relationships with men. She does not stick to one man as expected by the Zulu society.

Ingoduso- a betrothed woman:

Among the Zulu people marriage is an important traditional ceremony. When a girl grows up, she is taught by older women to behave and keep her virginity intact for her future husband. During the process of growing up there are many stages that she has to go through in preparation for marriage. *Ingoduso* is a word which means that *lobolo* has been paid and the woman is about to go and in isiZulu this means *ukugoduka* as she will go to another family. The whole process of marriage is called *ukwenda*.

Umjendevu/uzendaziyamshiya/ingugel'emavovweni/umgod'onganukwanja:

The word *umjendevu* refers to unmarried woman who has gone past the socially expected stage of marriage. According to Buthelezi (2004:396) a woman who has never married even by choice, is referred to as being unfortunate and is called by derogatory terms like *umjendevu* (meaning she has become a man) and *uzendaziyamshiya* (meaning they all got married and she was left behind). There are also other derogatory terms like, *ingugel'emavovweni* (the one who is hated) and *umgod'onganukwanja* (meaning no one is proposing love to her). There is a very strong language that is used to call unmarried women. A woman is obliged to have a man in her life because she is a man's possession; she either belongs to the father or the husband. That is why during the wedding ceremony, the father of the bride hands her over to the groom to take care of (Ndimande-Hlongwa & Mngoma 2014).

Isishimane:

The word *isishimane* refers to a man who is not popular with females and does not have many female lovers. Such a man tries to propose love to females but they reject him. No man in the Zulu society would want to be associated with failure in courtship. The social expectation is that a man must get married so that he will have children to continue his lineage. Another negative term that is used for men is *isigwadi* (the one who does not care about females at all). When a man is not associating himself with females, the society starts raising eyebrows and is called *isigwadi*. The family, in particular, assumes that he needs cleansing in order for him to be normal.

Data Analysis and Interpretation of the Findings

Based on the above words or phrases and their explanations, it is evident that there are gender inequalities in both the Kiswahili and IsiZulu languages. The implication thereof, is that both languages enhance the idea of gender inequalities in their respective communities. The enhancement of gender inequalities as evidenced in Kiswahili and IsiZulu as indigenous African languages does not derive from a vacuum. Gender inequalities are created and enhanced by multiple dimensions or aspects of the society. Using three out of four Bonilla-Silver’s framework (2006) components—*naturalization*, *minimization*, and *culture*, the authors of this article established that all three components can be applied to show how gender inequalities in both languages are enhanced as indicated in the table below.

Table1: Components of the Bonilla-Silver’s Framework, 2006 in Kiswahili and IsiZulu Language

Words: Kiswahili & IsiZulu	Naturalization	Minimization	Culture	%
<i>Oa/Olewa</i>	v	v	v	100%
<i>Bwana/Bibi</i>	v	v	v	100%
<i>Pambo la Nyumba</i>	v	v	v	66%
<i>Amepata Jiko</i>	x	v	v	66%
<i>Muungwana</i>	x	v	v	33%
<i>Isoka</i>	v	v	v	66%
<i>Isifebe</i>	x	v	v	66%
<i>Ingoduso</i>	x	v	v	66%
<i>Umjendevu/ uzendaziyamshiya</i>	v	x	v	33%
<i>Isishimane</i>	x	v	v	66%

Key: ‘V’ – Refers to the word or phrase that is matched with that Bonilla-Silver’s Framework Component

‘X’- Refers to the word or phrase that has no match with that in Bonilla-Silver’s Framework Component

Criteria of Scoring: 100% is given to the Swahili or IsiZulu word that matches all 3 components and 66% for words that match with only 2 components and 33% for a word that matches with one component.

According to Bonilla-Silver's Framework (2006), naturalization is a component that enhances gender inequalities because wives/women think it is a natural thing to give high level of respect to their husbands or men, which in many incidents is not given back to wives or women by men or husbands. According to Bonilla-Silver, by claiming that they are either naturally deserving respect or not, people attempt to excuse the general lack of respect towards women. This norm relieves African men from the blame for this inequality and ascribes it to nature. Furthermore, according to this norm, something natural cannot be changed through social actions. In other words, the naturalisation of gender inequality allows for the continuation of the problem because it is supposedly beyond human decisions. As it has been shown on Table 1, the words/phrases 'oa/olewa', 'bwana/bibi' and 'mwanamke pambo la nyumba' in Kiswahili language, and 'umjendevu/uzendaziyamshiya/ingugel'emavovweni' and 'isoka' in IsiZulu language, the contexts of these words/phrases exist because of the belief in nature. Some women and the society at large believe that the issues of men to marry women; men to be respected by their wives or female partners; a woman to be a decorator of the house; society to allow men to have multiple relationships with women; and women to get marriage at specific age, are all natural instances which human beings cannot change. For example, while the *isoka* in IsiZulu language undermines women freedom and profile by giving power to men to marry many wives, it has a very positive connotation in the society by celebrating men's victory to have many women. This implies that society's belief in the naturalization perspective undermines women's liberation and enhances gender inequality which tends to affect women more than men.

Regarding the minimization component, Bonilla-Silver's Framework (2006) asserts that women tend to minimise the impact of gender inequalities on them by ignoring that they are not respected or given a chance to exercise their freedom because they are women. By analysing the following words: 'oa/olewa', 'bwana/bibi', 'pambo la nyumba', 'amepata jiko, muungwana', 'isoka', 'isifebe' 'ingoduso', 'umjendevu/uzendaziyamshiya and isishimane', one finds how women accept their lower role within relationships just

because of their acceptance of their womanhood. In these situations, women fail to question these existing linguistic patterns, which unfortunately are used to exploit them within relationships. Women do not find any problems from these linguistic labels because, after all, they are just women.

According to Bonilla-Silver's Framework (2006), through the culture component in this framework, gender inequalities are enhanced. House chores and decision making are divided according to gender. Men and women have embraced this cultural concept because they believe it is what African culture wants. It is the culture that makes a man dominate his wife, a brother to dominate his sister, and men in the community to dominate women. These types of traditional contexts enhance gender inequalities since no one is ready to change. At the same time, women's power and rights have been undermined for so long in such a way that they cannot liberate themselves unless some external forces are applied. In fact, in some incidents, even when women are capable of liberating themselves, their liberation falls short because they end up doing things according to the culture which for sure undermines their rights. A close analysis of the following words/phrases: 'oa/olewa', 'bwana/bibi', 'pambo la pyumba', 'amepata jiko, muungwana', 'isoka', 'isifebe' 'ingoduso', 'umjendevu/ uzendaziyamshiya and isishimane', shows that their contexts of usage are enhanced by the cultural beliefs at play in any given moment.

Recommendations

On basis of the three components deriving from Bonilla-Silver (2006)'s framework as discussed in the foregoing pages, the authors of this article recommend several points to be noted when attempting to mitigate gender inequalities among users of Kiswahili and IsiZulu languages:

- Create policies to eliminate gender inequalities and insists on non-discriminatory forms in language applications, e.g. using vocabulary that does not demean, insult, exclude, stereotype, essentialize, and trivialize people (Luker 2010).
- Avoid exclusionary forms while carefully choosing inclusionary alternatives. Also, apply gender sensitivity in the use of differentiated

or devaluating terms that convey demeaning attitudes towards women. This includes also a need for more awareness and advocacy campaigns in changing sexist languages within languages (Buthelez, 2004:398).

- Promote gender fair-discourse practices to balance the representations of male and female (WILLA 2002). Also, create and enhance social categories, which highlight the field of social identity and location/function in gender discourse. Hence, the affirmation or cultivation of social identity is important and needed to reduce gender inequalities.
- Replace traditional forms that encourage gender inequalities while encouraging social gender to designate grammatical gender which must be called to reduce gendered language inequalities (Shitemu 2009:8).
- Replace words with gender connotations with gender neutral terms (Buthelezi, 2004), while enhancing community participation in practices that involve learning the various fields and values attached to categories is required (Shitemu 2009:8).
- Although language may very well play a role in promoting gender equality, positive reforms need to be put in place so as to create a fruitful avenue for improving the status of women. In this regard, it is important to emphasise that linguistic modification must be accompanied by social and political adjustments in order to truly change existing asymmetries in gender (Prewitt-Freilino et al. 2011:281). As such, the following broader aspects need to be implemented to create society which respects gender equity and equality.
- As Melvin (2007) stresses, the desired change that can take place through the provision of adequate knowledge and information so that people are persuaded and inspired to participate actively in changing cultural practices that undermine gender equalities while enhancing gender inequalities.

Conclusion

Gender inequalities within society as evidenced in language patterns continue to affect women more than men. This is due to the unequal treatment of the male and female genders. On the one hand, gender inequalities can be seen through social, economic, educational, cultural and historical perspectives. These perspectives are enhanced by stereotypes that insist on men superiority over women. Additionally, gender inequalities are perpetuated by naturalization, minimization and cultural factors (Bonilla-Silver 2006). While language still plays an important role as a medium of communication, it also enhances gender inequalities through words, phrases, and sentences as we have shown in this article in both isiZulu and Kiswahili. It is, therefore, important for the society to reduce if not entirely eradicate gender inequalities. The desired change among members of society can only take place through the provision of adequate knowledge and information that can be provided through informal and formal education at the individual, family and community levels. Since in some incidents gender inequalities could be a crime against humanity and justice, and in this case in point against women, it is crucial that both women and men take charge when engaging in cultural and social principles that enhance the concept of gender equity and equalities. It, therefore, remains critical that indigenous African languages in this case, IsiZulu and Kiswahili engage in broader explications through genuine gender equality/inequality dialogues that may positively impact the majority. These dialogues should be conducted through the language(s) not only the majority understands but also, those that do not enhance gender inequalities. Thus, the methods and messages of enhancing gender equality among male(s) and female(s) is of utmost importance.

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