LANGUAGE, EDUCATION AND GENDER

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Abstract

Language, Education and Gender (LEG) form a love triangle that is at the heart of learning. Like the LEG that enables movement, the relationship is expected to steer the teaching and learning process and enable the learner achieve education. It is chiefly through language that we communicate. Only humans possess language. Yet language is a part of culture. By itself, it carries meaning. One of the major concerns in education and in the education systems in the World and in Africa is the call for Education for All (EFA). Girls' education has particularly come into sharp focus due to the low enrolment and poorer achievement of girls in education. Focus has mainly been on the statistics. However, an utmost need arises on the need to evaluate the teaching and learning process. Language is a very important tool in this process and in the socialisation process. To achieve gender equity in and through education, language must be addressed. This paper looks at the relationship between language, education and gender (LEG) as a form of mobility to facilitate the gender equity initiative. It illustrates the nature and extent to which language affects the education process. In education, four language skills namely reading, listening, speaking and writing are implanted. The education system must be conscious of the way in which these skills are instilled in the individual learner/s as well as the process of teaching and learning.

Keywords: Language, Education, Gender, Sexism, Social Semiotics.

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PART   I: INTRODUCTION

Background on language and gender

This paper is in response to several studies on language, education and gender. One of the major concerns in education and in the education systems in the World and in Africa is the call for Education for All (EFA). Girls' education has particularly come into sharp focus due to the low enrolment and poorer achievement of girls in education. Focus has mainly been on the statistics. However, an utmost need arises on the need to evaluate the teaching and learning process. Language is a very important tool in this process and in the socialisation process. It is through language that people communicate human experience. In addition, pupils and students have to be taught using language and/or several languages in the actual curriculum. Children too hear and learn from the language in use. Is it possible that most of the gender attitudes are implanted into them in the early part of their education when they learn and are taught in the language of the catchment area and that these are later reinforced in other languages (for example, English) as the language/s is/are taught and pupils and students acquire proficiency in the language/s? This paper addresses this concern.

Studies conducted to investigate whether the grammatical apparatus in human languages devalue women reveal that English words for example, show a sexist bias against women (Whort, 1976; Smith, 1985; Graddol & Swann, 1989; Poynton, 1989). English words for women and men, for example, are rarely parallel and several differences and inequalities reflect themselves in the (English) lexicon. It is commonly acceptable among these studies that generic 'man' and the pronoun 'he' easily refers to the male and thus excludes the female. The use of such terms in various role contexts serves to deny the females identification in these contexts and stereotypes the females and males. This renders language sexist.

A question that arises from such findings is, can such observations be made in other languages? In what ways, for example, does sexism manifest itself in

African ethnic languages and how does this reflect itself in the education process? This work summarizes the findings of several studies conducted in this respect in relation to language, education and gender with a view to determine:

- In what ways does language devalue women?
- To what extent does this reflect itself in the lexicon of a language?
- How does this manifest itself in the teaching learning process?

Cameron (1985:81-82) argues that people do not necessarily learn words from dictionaries but rather infer their meanings in particular contexts. The study sets out to investigate the extent to which the meanings in some words tend to crystallize sexism, that is, gender attitudes of dominance and subservience that undermine the quest for equality among the sexes.

In the last two decades, a lot of debate has concentrated on women's role in society and gender relations. This has resulted in the feminist movement. Feminism aims at liberating women from all types of inequalities globally. This is because overall development cannot be achieved without the participation of all persons including women. Consequently, this paper highlights areas of language use that have direct implications for this movement. It concurs with arguments put forward, for example, by Ortega (1990), a theologian who reckons that if we are committed to working for a better humanity for all, we have to be aware that it is not possible so long as we are limited by the language and images embedded in it that we use unconsciously or by choice.

The role of language in shaping the natural image of things in society is a topic not new to many people within and outside the realms of linguistics. Giles (1979:3) a linguist for example, notes that one of the important ways in which we can influence others and can be equally influenced by them is through language. Thus language has not escaped the feminists and the feminist movement (Hymes, 1967; Kaplan, 1976; Smith, 1985; Graddol and Swann, 1989, Kabira 1991, 1994). In particular, feminists have argued that through language, girls' and women's roles and stereotypes have been conditioned and influenced into society. Therefore, it is imperative that people must take hold of

language and discover the degree of influence that women suffer and continue to be discriminated in it.

It is along these lines that Graddol and Swann (1989:132) thus conclude:

> *Underlying much of the discussion of language and social values is the notion of a dominant social group (male, white, middle class etc.) that is somehow able to impose its meanings on the other language users.*

In language and gender studies, males are seen as imposing their meaning on females. Spender (1980:143) for example states that males as the dominant group have produced language, thought and reality and that in the process women have played little or no part. Thus, male subjectivity has been the source of those meanings "including the meaning that their own subjectivity is objectivity". Language varies with other linguistic elements and also with a number of extra-linguistic independent variables such as sex, age and social class (Milroy, 1980). Thus gender (sex) is only one of the many cultural influences that manipulate linguistic behaviour. Yet differences in the language of the speaker have been observed in language. They take many forms such as the multi-lingualism that is highly valued by and associated with males of a New Guinea complex but devalued by women. Women are associated with prestige patterns and vice versa (Milroy, 1980). They are also thought to initiate linguistic change (Labov, 1972) and to be polite, delicate and use simple structures. Other forms of linguistic activity such as gossip, storytelling and private diaries are associated more with women. These are all in the realm of linguistics rather than general language behaviour.

Nevertheless, language sex stereotypes affect the general learning process of girls and women in that at most this humbles them into a subordinate position in which their participation and achievement are suppressed in favour of the males (boys and men). This could discourage girls from achieving higher education status. In this respect, language in relation to education and the teaching and learning processes need to be more selective and exclude certain terms and expressions that hamper girls' and women education (Wango, 1998b; 1999) and overall empowerment.

PART 2:   LANGUAGE AND GENDER

People learn about and respond to others in terms of the categories and groups to which they belong. Sex, age, race and ethnicity, religion, occupation and social economics status are some of the more salient large-scale dimensions that people choose from the repertoire of features employed on a regular basis. People's thinking about males and females has led to a large concentration of research on sex differences. This is chiefly because the knowledge of one's sex is seemingly just but one of the many bases for predicting behaviour as relates to humans.

Sex refers to the physiological features (biological) that distinguish a human being as female or male. At birth, one is explicitly categorised on a gender scale into male or female. Often, most people take it for granted that there are two sexes, discrete and overlapping. Sex is well defined by biological variables and the two sexes are fundamentally distinct in certain respects in spite of endless individual variation. At times, the sexes are in binary opposition, a matter of kind in which one must be either. How this definite nature is achieved and maintained is through many processes. But it gives a cue for all sorts of discrete beliefs, exceptions and behaviours of a person. But while sex is nature, gender is nurture. While sex is natural, gender is the product of human activity.

Gender therefore refers to the social, cultural and psychological differences or identities of females and males. For most purposes, there are two biological sexes, females and males. But there are numerous versions of what it is to be male or female. The individual society prescribes what is essential to and characteristics of the sexes, both positive and negative. As a result, the social and cultural consequences of being born female or male are extremely varied and serious. It is here that the ideals of femininity and masculinity are first understood and brought into play (Kabira and Masheti, 1997). Gender identity is conceived and arrangements organized for and according to the sexes.

Sex and not any other self-evident explicit fact of social organisation is in the first instance the result of a general consensus about certain characteristics: physical, biological, behavioural and/or otherwise, that are said to distinguish males from females. Issues that emerge in the discussion of this vignette are central to the whole area of language research for sex differences, beliefs, and values influences and affect language and by extension for the purpose of this paper, education and learning. This is because language is a part of culture. Social factors influence and are in turn influenced by language and other patterns of communication, behaviour, evaluation and change. Therefore, the interlocking relation between language, sex and gender is a very crucial one and captivates many people's interest. One line of activity is stimulated by the concern with how female and males are represented in language.

It is interesting that language is an attribute only of the human race. It is the inalienable right of every human being. Language is a social fact and as such, it carries meaning. In stressing the social character of language, linguists have established a relation into the rather elusive relation between language and social structure. This is because language is in a quite direct sense the expression of fundamental attributes of the social structural system (Halliday, 1978; Halliday and Hasan, 1989). In this way, language reflects the social system and the social concepts.

Thus words that we give to our world are not fixed, they are arbitrary symbols or labels that people associate with things in our world. They are the way in which society fixes objects in the human mind. In this way, language becomes a part of our world and our socialisation process. Language embodies the abstract relations of a particular cultural community. Since language is manifested in speech and in writing, it is evident that in each speech act or piece of writing, both the speaker and the culture (society) come out simultaneously (Kramer, 1978; Kress, and Hodge, 1979; Krramarae, 1980). The word/s reflect both the social (cultural) and the individual person and some of his or her perceptions of particular issue/s in society. This is because words in speech or in writing signify our thoughts, attitudes, feelings, cultural beliefs, desires and aspirations.

Language is the primary means in which we create the categories that subsequently come to organise our lives (Poyton, 1989). It is therefore one of the most important ways through which we can influence and can be influenced by other (Giles, 1979). Yet all known languages appear to use language as one means of, or among others to mark out gender differences, gender strictly speaking therefore being cultural and sex a biological category. Linguistics tend also to view sex as a major speaker variable and class differences are seen in terms of sex rather than the opposite (Labov, 1972; Milroy, 1980; Horvath, 1985). Yet language differences have been noted to be subtle and few and sometimes they have not been found where they were expected. This has led some scholars to believe that where such differences exist in speech, writing or style, they are not primarily markers of sex. However, some forms of language use are popularly associated with either of the sexes. For example, gossip, keeping of diaries, storytelling and private letters are popularly associated with women while taboo and obscene words is still thought to be more common for males than females. Males also tend to use more of the stigmatised variants in regard to females irrespective of class particularly in informal contexts.

It is generally acceptable that females tend to speak less than one might expect under the circumstances especially in the company of men. In most cases, this does not seem to be due to their unwillingness or inability to contribute to a discussion or conversation, lack of intelligence or ideas or inarticulateness. Rather, and on the contrary, most women have a lot to say and contribute on many issues especially and obviously so those that concern and affect them. But they never get the opportunity or/and they are socialised to be humble, polite and quiet. Yet humbleness and kindliness is not quietness or helplessness. Therefore, teachers need to be careful in class to allow girls who have been socialised to be shy to ask and answer questions in class. They must probe them. This way, the girls too will get an opportunity to learn.

Often, males are seen as masculine (maleness) and they tend to demonstrate their status and are hence rated by their occupation, power, social economic status, abilities and capabilities. Gender differences would therefore be expected in language because of males' and females' social status, resources

and opportunities. In national examinations in Kenya, girls / females are said to perform better in the languages and to use more refined language especially pronunciation than the males/boys. This is the concern of sociolinguistic language patterns.

However, it is noteworthy to note that speech traits especially associated with females are posited as actual characteristics peculiar to them. This is often seen negatively. For example, the syntactic forms associated with males are often rated as more intelligent and complex than those associated with females. Actual linguistic study has not revealed this to be the case. What clearly emerges is the fact that very few of these differences if any especially in speech are found to be perfectly correlated with the sex of the speaker. They are a matter of degree and correspond and are equally sensitive to other variations in the context of speech, age of the speaker, social economic status and/or the situation of the speaker.

Consequently, a distinction is made between sex and sexism. Biological sex and cultural sexism can be seen in personal names for females and males. A distinction is also made between grammatical gender and semantic sex (Crystal, 1985:133). In languages such as German, there is grammatical gender in which every noun has a gender that has to be learnt separately (Muhlhausler & Harre, 1990: 228). In French, Latin and Spanish, things are classified in terms of sex and sexless-ness. In French for example, chair and table are feminine while books are masculine. In Spanish, the moon is feminine and the sun masculine. In semantic sex, words are analysed in terms of their gender content and the connotations embedded in the word/s. Grammatical gender is not a feature of English except when certain parts of the language such as pronouns are analysed in such terms (Spender, 1980; Smith, 1985).

Most African languages especially the Bantu languages have no grammatical gender markers (Hemery, 1903; Barlow, 1960; Wango, 1998a, 1998b). Like English they do not have an overt category of gender that requires all lexis (words) to be identified as masculine, feminine, or neuter but a covert category revealed, for example, in personal names for males and females. Nevertheless,

they have a semantic sex in which words can be analysed in terms of sex/gender semantic content and/or connotations (Wango, 1998a).

The choice of language and lexis (words) and a study based in Sociolinguistics and Social semiotics is noteworthy. Halliday (1978:43) views the lexicon as the most delicate grammar. Poynton (1989:50) singles out the vocabulary (lexis) of a language as the most obvious repository of the meanings of man and woman in English. She contends that lexis is the most accessible part of language to those not trained as linguists and that it seems that it is the lexis that conveys meaning. In view of the foregoing, it is important for studies and researchers to address language as an issue in the Education for All (EFA) initiative (World Bank, 1986, 1988; Wolpe, Quinlan and Martinez, 1997). This is because our everyday words are the most accessible part of language to those who are not trained as linguists. It is also in the everyday language that meaning and experience are conveyed and the social cultural relations and attitude/s to different things and issues or lack of them imparted into society.

PART 3:   GENDER DISPARITIES IN EDUCATION

Education is essential in development. Education and literacy are the primary means to overcome poverty, ignorance and disease (Republic of Kenya, 1963). This is because education enables the individual to actively participate in the development process of society and the nation at large. The major World conferences on education have drawn attention to and prioritised education as both a basic human need and right and an essential tool for social-economic development, as a right and not a privilege.

But inequalities between boys and girls, women and men in education and consequent employment, in politics and in the social economic life has created the basis for gender concerns and debate among educationalists, researchers and gender lobby groups. This is because education is a powerful tool towards reducing the existing gender gaps and promoting development. Education for girls' / women has been hindered by a number of factors that have resulted in poor scholarly habits and consequent poor performance and achievement that prevents women from achieving their full potential and participate equally in social, political and economic development.

Female education in particular has a multiplying effect besides the individual personal empowerment it gives to the girl child and the obvious opportunities afforded by education. In particular: it leads to lower child mortality rates; improves the family nutrition and care; results in lower population growth rates; leads to improved personal and health care; and, it leads to higher educational attainment for all. Female education is therefore very crucial. Perhaps more than any other investment, it is the critical to enhanced female status and it is decisive to personal development and an integral ingredient in the empowering process.

However, children, pupils and students are socialised into "appropriate" sexual roles at their early stages of growth and development. This makes this essential education difficult, at most impossible. They take these different

roles at home, in school and in the social community. Thus girls and boys have different perceptions to different careers including: teaching (science, languages, arts or technical subjects); medicine (doctor, nurse, pharmacists); judiciary (judge, lawyer or court clerk); management (manager, secretary, receptionist), banking, (manager, clerk, teller, secretary /receptionist); engineering, technician and other careers. This ought not be. The situation has arisen out of the fact that stereotypical images are used to damage girls' self-esteem and discourage them from pursuing and exploiting their full potential. Females are often trivialised and depicted as inadequate, words that by themselves belittle them, their abilities and capabilities. Males in turn are made to feel superior, capable and as achievers which motivates them. This eventually leads to a viscous circle with little achievement for the women folk and high attainment for males.

Investing in girls'/ women education means more than just providing them with education: it means removing the barriers that prevent them from realising and exploiting their fall potential not as women but as human beings and thus recognising and performing their vital roles as valuable members of, and in society. Such social attitudes must not be allowed in the classroom for the school offers an opportune moment for the girls to excel and prove their worth.

Despite various efforts and commitments to promote girls education, there are considerably glaring gender disparities especially among communities that hold on to certain traditional practices that hinder and discourage girls' education. These disparities from primary to secondary levels reach the final mark in higher levels of learning and eventually in the job market and in employment opportunities available to both sexes. It is no wonder that fewer women are in management positions in the private sector and in government.

Three major issues emerge in regard to education. These are:
- Input: access and enrolment in education.
- Process: attendance, participation and retention in school.
- Output: performance and achievement in education.

It is in regard to these issues this paper looks at the relationship between language, education and gender (LEG). This relationship is likened to the leg that facilitates mobility. If the leg or any part thereof that facilitates mobility is handicapped or impaired, mobility is slowed down or brought to a standstill. Similarly, we must study the background of education in a system like Kenya and comprehend the structural aspects in order to come up with policies, systems and procedures that are aligned to the philosophical underpinnings of the Kenyan community (Keller, 1980; Bogonko, 1992; Eshiwani, 1993). Language use at each of these stages and in the entire teaching and learning process must not discourage the child especially the girl child from attending school, participating in the class or achieving his or her full potential.

PART 4:   THE SOCIAL SEMIOTICS MODEL

The Social Semiotic Theory of language was first developed by Malinowski (1923) and later expanded by Firth (1935, 1950) and Hymes (1967). It is well exemplified and advanced as a theory of language by Halliday (1978) and Halliday & Hasan (1989). Its concern is with the use of language and the way language interacts in and with society.

The social semiotic framework has a social dimension that makes it particularly plausible to study language and gender. Its basis is in semantics, the meaning making system (Hurford & Heasley, 1985). The theory seeks to consider and identify the role that certain linguistic items, for example, words as text or in context function in building meaning and in structuring and restructuring our social relations. Also, language as social semiotics is highly associated with experience, reality, interaction in language use and socially in-built processes of language use (Halliday: 1978; Halliday & Hasan: 1989; Poynton: 1989).

In the theory, the semantic system is the meaning potential embodied in the language. It is itself the realization of a higher-level semiotic, a behavioural system, and a social semiotic. In this way, language is understood and related in its relationship to social structure. Thus the approach to understanding language is seen to lie in the study of the way language is used and in the words of the language. Text or words and the context in which they occur are therefore intimately related. Neither can be enunciated or understood without the other (Halliday & Hasan, 1989:52). This is because words by themselves have a social context. A word is a product of that process. The nature of words is such that they are made up of meaning. Thus meaning is expressed or coded in words and in the structure of the words. Included in the word and the context in which it occurs are other non-verbal goings-on-the total environment in which a word unfolds. Hence a word or text is a semantic entity and a social exchange of meanings. Thus both words and their use in social context can be studied.

Words and the context in which they occur are both a product and a process.

They are a product in the sense that a word is an output with a certain construction represented in systematic ways, and a process in the sense of a continuous process of semantic choice made in a network of further potential choices, an interactive event and a social exchange of meaning.

Similarly, a word is both an object and an instance. A word is (Halliday & Hasan, 1989:11-12) a product of its environment, a product of a continuous process of choices in meaning. Thus words can be studied as text and in context. This is because words and their connotations is a product of the environment. They embody our thoughts and our attitude/s towards the society in which we live. Often, the speaker is continuously making a choice between one word or/and another. Therefore, it is possible using the model to study words in two ways namely: what the word means; and, how the word is used in context.

In the semiotic model, this is done using the three features of the context of situation namely: the field - what is happening; the tenors - who are taking part; and, the mode - the role the language is playing. In education and the teaching and learning process in particular, the role of the teacher in passing knowledge to the pupil both as a role model and as an authority (in the subject and in the accepted roles as the guardians of the children) brings language to the forefront. The school system is such that there is the teacher and the pupil, the curriculum and the extra curriculum and the total environment in which it all unfolds. At the core of it all is language. This is the basis of analysis of word meanings in context. Therefore, there is need to pay careful attention to language in use.

Function and meaning in the semantics are expressed in the following ways: field through experiential (transitivity, naming); tenor through interpersonal (mood, modality, person); and, mode in the textual (theme, information, cohesive relations). Poynton (1989:56) explains 'field' as the portions of socially constructed experience recognized as discrete portions by means of that culture. These are commonly institutionalised to the extent of having a name, for example, athletics and music or maybe such institutionalised to the extent of being identifiable as a formally constituted social institution. In

language and words in use, the meaning and use of such words is conventional. Hence, there is needed to be careful about words.

Such names include names at childbirth, male and female words and ceremonial words while social institutions such as home and marriage correspond to them. This shows up linguistically in terms of the differences in relations and what is talked about or expressed by people. In turn, it determines who are taking part, who uses the word or whether it is general, and the role of language in communication and ultimately in social semiotics. Discussion can then be carried out of the various images and implications of the words with regard to the objectives, hypothesis and within the theoretical framework.

The lexis (words) of a language are said to be organized into a hyponymic hierarchy with differing degrees of generality (Halliday & Hasan, 1989:80). However, the extent to which words are generic in relation to masculine and feminine relations can be investigated and is an issue that need further investigation.

Halliday's social semiotic approach (Halliday, 1978; Halliday and Hasan, 1989) to language has a number of real strengths especially in relation to language, education and gender. First, its basis is semantics not syntactic. While not denying that syntax is an important language component, it seeks to consider and identify the role of various linguistics items in any text in terms of their function in building meaning. Second, it is not uniquely interested in written language but with the study of both written and spoken texts in that each is illuminated because of its contrast with the other. Thus the four language skills: reading, listening, speaking and writing can be studied. Finally, it permits useful movements across the text addressing the manner in which linguistic patterning built up meaning and the overall construction of a text.

The contribution of social semiotic to feminist language study is therefore threefold. Firstly, it has a literally criticism which enables the researcher to study the use of language in imaginative literature and female creativity. This for example can be seen in the short stories used in class and in textbooks.

Secondly, it engulfs the theory of 'gendered subjectivity' (Spender, 1980; Cameron, 1985, 1990) that is, gender in relation to the subject of discussion. This seeks to study and determine whether women are alienated in language and society and if so, whether this is because they have to learn a male language. Thirdly, it is concerned with the overall construction of sexual identity and it insists on a linguistic basis for that process of construction. This means that when one studies language using the model, one concentrates upon exploring how language is systematically patterned towards important social ends. This makes it extraordinarily relevant in language and gender studies. To study language using the social semiotic model is therefore to concentrate upon exploring how language is systematically patterned towards important social ends. This includes the education process/es.

Thus social semiotics does not counterpoise social (gender) nor the biological (sex) as two independent and reified domains of cause and effect because neither uniquely determines or defines patterned social semiotic behaviour. Instead, it lays a link with social theory and articulates links between semiotic forms, their uses and functions and language since language is ultimately involved in the manner in which we construct and organise our human experiences. It is a theory of social meaning making practices (Thibault, 1991:6).

In addition, social semiotics is unique in that it strives to be a critical and self-reflexive theory of the dynamics of these social meaning making practices (Firth, 1935, 1950; Hymes, 1967). It is critical in that it shows how regular and systematic patterning of a text and in context functions in ways that enact, maintain, reproduce or change the social semiotic system. It is self-reflexive because it accounts for its own place within the same critical perspective, that is, it defines its own relations to other social discourses, language structure, its position in the relations of meaning for example, and the interests these serve. Furthermore, it is concerned with identifying potential areas of intervention and change in the interrelations between society and language and the systems of social meaning making that constitute it.

As a result, social semiotics theory enables researchers and educationalists to pay close attention to the ways in which word relations (both female and male) wield various forms of influence in the text of the language. The cultural ideologies emanating from the words are the ones the society has inherited as subject matter, are unquestionable, and are often acknowledged and passed on consciously or unconsciously. In this instance, the context includes education in Kenya (Njoroge and Bennaars, 1986; Eshiwani, 1993) as well as the role of women (Mugo, 1975; Masheti, 1994). It therefore enables proper interpretation of words individually and in context. This is crucial in the learning process.

PART 5:   SEXISM IN LANGUAGE

Linguists concerned with language, gender and sex have often raised the general question: can language have a sexist bias? If so, what are the effects of this on the person/s using the language and on the learners who are learning the language and/ or in the language? (Bodine, 1975; Miller and Swift, 1976; Wango, 1998a, 1998b). Some have argued that language is not neutral (Whorf, 1976; Spender, 1980) and that rather than being a vehicle which carries ideas, language is by itself a shaper of ideas and the programme for mental activity (Cameron, 1985, 1990). Lakoff (1975), Graham (1975), Thome & Henry (1975) and Thorne et al. (1983) have particularly argued that there exist systematic differences in the language use of females and males. Language cannot of course be disassociated from meaning. This is because it is chiefly through language that human beings express themselves.

Yet linguistic inequalities have been shown to relate to social inequalities and practices, for example, black versus white (Labov, 1972). Graddol and Swann (1989:98) discuss at length these linguistic distinctions, that is, bias in the structure of a language. The lexicon is the abstract system, they note. Their discussion is in agreement with other linguists (Smith, 1985; Poynton, 1989) and the fact that even dictionary compilers have to agree on the meaning of a word. This implies that there is a particular meaning associated with a word/s as text, though the interpretation or use in the system may differ. But when it comes to actual use of words, they are the most fixed in what is referred to as system and use as different from syntactic structures.

In the formal education system, there is need to pay careful attention to the word/s in use and how they are used. In a study of words in Gikuyu for example (Wango, 1998a, 1998b), it was found that both word as text and in context corresponded very well, that is, the text and the co-text or what Graddol and Swann (1989:98) call system and use. This is also true of English (Poynton, 1989). Teachers, parents, authors and publishers and indeed all educators must be very particular about the language they use.

Four criteria are often used to classify sexism in language. These are:

a) *Exclusion / silence* - when the actions, achievements and contributions of women are omitted and /or ignored;

b) *Subordination / naming and representation* - in which the females are defined and seen through a relationship to male rather than as independent individual individuals;

c) *Degradation* - in which the female is described only in stereotyped roles with less than her full range of human interests, traits, abilities and capabilities; and,

d) *Distortion* - in which females are described with an emphasis on their appearance and stereotypical behaviour such as talkativeness, immaturity and emotionality or society's general feelings or/and attitudes.

In these and other examples, females (girls and/or women) are stereotyped, for example, they are either poor in mathematics and sciences or their education, work and other aspects are ridiculed. None of the examples provided describes a specific characteristic, trait or attribute that is particular or peculiar to males or females whether positive or negative.

a)   *Exclusion / silence* - when the actions, achievements and contributions of girls and women are omitted and /or ignored.

This is nowhere more evident than in education, words and illustrations (Wango, 1999). It can be seen in such examples as follows:

EX 1: The farmer <u>works</u> in the farm while his wife <u>remains</u> at home.
'Works' and 'remains' are different. The sentence by itself clearly implies that the farmer is male because of the pronoun 'his' and tends to exclude the female from work. He works, while the wife and women in general by implication do not work but remain at home. This is further reinforced by the fact that women contribute over 80% of the labour force and especially 90 % of the work at home. Yet this work is never quantified but is taken for granted as part of their duties. Thus she is ignored.

EX 2: Boys are <u>talented</u> in sciences while girls <u>do well</u> in the arts.

Talent is a natural empowerment, and a child can achieve in sciences or arts. 'Do well' implies that they sort of work hard or have to put on extra effort to achieve this end. This ignores the fact that learning is a natural process and any person is capable of performing well given the necessary support and a conducive environment.

EX 3: Picture of a boy <u>riding</u> to school while the girl <u>walks</u> to school.

Pictures, drawings, paintings and illustrations are a part of language and communicate very efficiently. Such a picture of a boy riding by implication gives the false impression that girls are either not supposed to ride or they are not capable, that is excluded from such privileged activities.

EX 4: Boys should carry /remove the chairs / tables / desks while the girls sweep / wash the class.

This, given in the form of instructions or as a statement implies that boys have the physical energy to do the hard work while the girls' contribution in sweeping or washing the class is silent or played down upon. It would be more appropriate to draw out schedules that allow both boys and girls to clean and maintain their own environment.

EX 5: Four men worked in a farm for six months and four days. How many men would it take to work on the same farm for two days?

This happens when arithmetic puzzles especially in mathematics are given of boys/male only. These examples tend to exclude females and make them silent in society and in various subjects. All sexes must be included in examples and illustrations provided in text books, charts and diagrams.

EX 6: Men go to work while women remain at home.

Again, this example (as in *EX 1*) given in such subjects like Home Science, Business Studies and Economics tend to reinforce the wrong concept that males work while females do not work, that is, males contribute to economic and national development while women don't. Females also work and contribute to the general economy in a full-size way.

EX 7: Dialogue in text or class or when answering questions.

Certain textual dialogue tends to silence the women when they make them talk less in relation to the men. Teachers in school should ensure that both girls and boys are given a chance to ask and answer questions in class. This is because most girls tend to shy off after they are continuously ignored.

EX 8: Mr. Karanja has a shop. Below is the list of stocks he bought.

Examples given in Business Education / Economics / Accounts / Commerce should also include females since they also engage in business and to encourage girls in these fields, subjects and careers.

EX 9: This meeting is for men.

This statement quoted from Chinua Achebe's <u>Things Fall Apart</u> is but an example of how textbooks often used in school have a gender bias. Man in this statement clearly excludes the females and ignores or excludes them from other members of the society.

EX 10: The Headmaster of the school.

This example is often used to refer to the head of a school even when the head is female. It propagates the wrong concept that heads of institutions are male. This could discourage females from aspiring to positions of leadership as their gender is ignored.

Silence does not necessary mean that women are usually silent, nor does it in any way or form indicate an inability on their part. Rather, it is in a way a reflection of the society's culture in which girls and women are often excluded from daily life and/or their contributions are ignored, omitted, played down upon or diminished.

b)   *Subordination / naming and representation* - in which the females are defined and seen through a relationship to male rather than as independent individuals.

This can be seen in use of phrases. Examples include:

EX 11:   Phrasing:

    (i)   The man, his wife and children went to church.

    (ii)   They have many sons and daughters.

    (iii)   Boys and girls go to class.

    (iv)   Brothers and sisters please wait.

In these and other examples the males come first. Phrasing that often tends to put the male before the female perpetuates the idea that this is the natural order of things, that is, males always come first. This phenomenon whether conscious or not is prevalent in the use of phrases and in the presentations of information in charts and diagrams. It also falsely represents the females in terms of males.

EX 12: The farmer and his wife ...

This statement implies that the farmer is male. It also makes the wife of the male farmer subordinate to him. Thus the wife is seen in terms of the farmer (male) and as the wife rather than as an independent person. This unconsciously could imply the female has no career and is not independent. Education in particular must empower the individual person.

EX 13: Always accompany your brother to school.

This seemingly innocent remark is often meant for the girl child. Such accompaniments tend to convey the wrong impression that the female must accompany the male rather than yearn for independence. At worst when it refers to the school, it conveys the wrong impression that it is the brother who is going to school to learn and that she is only accompanying him. This would not encourage the females to aspire for education.

EX 14: The father is the head of the family.

EX 15: Tell your father to come to school.

EX 16: You must come to school accompanied by your father.

EX 17:   Tell your father to pay the school fees.

The concept that the father is the head of the family has been conceptualised in and outside language even in subjects that teach about the home. In general

instructions regarding the welfare of the child, the concept has been inbuilt such that most people have not internalised that there are single parents, be they females or males and that there are parent guardians. The word parent would simply serve the purpose since the functions and services in all the above examples are not biological or gender specific.

EX 19: *Behind every successful man is a woman.*
This statement though seemingly positive has a pejorative tinge: it is only men (males) who are successful. The woman's success is thus seen in the male and not a personal attribute. This subordinates the females.

Cameron (1985, 1990) calls it women spoken about. In this perspective, language and society has adopted linguistic habits and ideas, which continue to have covert significance in the culture based on the language. In this way, females continue to be seen as an extension to the male or they are assumed. In education and in society, this promotes the male domain and silences the females while such other Examples as *14, 15, 16* and *17* serve no good purpose.

c)   *Degradation* - in which the female is described only in stereotyped roles with less than her full range of human interests, traits, abilities and capabilities.

In these examples, females (girls) are stereotyped. For example, they are either poor in mathematics and sciences or the value of their education is in doubt. This can be seen in the following examples:

EX 19: *Girls are very poor in mathematics.*
EX 20: *Girls have difficulty in maths and sciences.*
EX 21: *Girls perform poorly in maths and sciences.*

These are often taken as true statements of fact. This is misleading to the girls and they may fail to pursue these subjects and careers related to them. On the contrary, there are difficulties in the teaching and learning of these and other subjects that make it difficult for pupils and students especially

girls to perform and excel in them.

EX 22: Few girls make it to the university.

Although fewer females than males are admitted, for example, in public universities in Kenya (30%), this does not mean that females are not endowed with the intellectual capacity to attain minimum entry requirements. Instead, it is lack of opportunity.

EX 23: It is better to educate a boy than to educate a girl.
EX 24: Girls do not have to go to school.

Education is for all. It is better to educate a child than fail to educate the child.

EX 25: Girls cannot grasp such hard concepts (especially in physics and chemistry).

There really are no difficult concepts for an average student. It is a question of how a concept is taught and conceptualised. This can be resolved through effective teaching and learning. Mathematics, Science and Technical (SMT) subjects have nothing to do with the male female concepts of learning except perhaps within such topics as reproduction. Indeed, females are said to be more keen to detail and hence one would expect girls and females to excel in SMT subjects.

d)   *Distortion* - in which females are described with an emphasis on their appearance and stereotypical behaviour such as talkativeness, immaturity and emotionality or society's general feelings and/or attitude/s.

Look at the following examples:

EX 26: Girls do not answer or ask questions. Only boys do.

This is absolutely wrong. Girls' and women in the more traditional societies are socialised to be quiet, humble and reserved. They are often never given a

chance to ask or answer questions and this is also generally true for all pupils /students in class. If students don't ask or answer questions, it has something to do with the concept/s, whether the concept/s has been grasped or not and the teaching methodology and not the sex of the individual pupils / students.

EX 27: Girls do not read.
Reading is a culture that has to be cultivated. It has nothing to do with the sex of the individual.

EX 28: Girls (women) like crying.
Crying is an expression of emotions and is a normal human reaction. All persons express their emotions in one way or another positively or negatively.

EX 29: Let the girl's sweep/wash the class while the boys go out to play.
This is wrong. All pupils/students need to play. Also, all of them use the classroom and there is an absolute need to inculcate in all of them the need for personal and general hygiene.

EX 30: Home science is for girls. Let the boys choose the sciences.
Subjects and by implication career choices should be open to all students. This should enhance and enable the individual realise her or his full potential.

EX 31: Girls are shy. Boys are not.
Shyness and other personality characteristics and traits are not particular to any sex: they have something to do with the human personality.

The way of talking about things reveals both the attitudes and assumptions that people might have as well as those people have acquired as part of the socialization process. The society has wrongly propagated the ideology that females are inferior and subordinate to the males and this has been inculcated in language. It is no wonder that this continues to be passed on consciously or *unconsciously through language and worse still, in school through education* and the learning process. Both males and females irrespective of their educational background or age have engulfed the phenomenon. There is need to change it.

Schools are a reflection of the general gender inequalities in society that they are located and of which they are a part. Therefore, societal values and attitudes accruing from society spill over into schools. These discriminating values, attitudes and beliefs deriving from society inevitably promote gender inequalities in all aspects of society. The school must be a focus for positive constructive societal change. This must begin with language.

Many gender related problems in school such as poor sanitation and other physical facilities like desks have their root in gender blind management at school level and the lack of awareness in commitment on the implications of gender issues for males and females. Females are generally un-represented in School Management Committees (SMC), Parents' Teachers Associations (PTA) and Boards of Governors (BOGs). This is because they are rarely selected or appointed to these bodies, they do not seek election or they are not proposed. Where they are parents, they are unable to speak up for various reasons that range from outright societal expectations of them to be quiet, their ideas, views and opinions being suppressed in favour of male ideas or inadequate exposure makes them passive listeners. One major deterrent to this would be adequate representation of females in School Management Committees, Parents' Teachers Associations and in the Boards of Governors.

Lakoff (1975) notes that women are discriminated in language in two ways: in the way general language treats them and in the way they are taught to use language. She notes that these differences are well predictable with reference to the different roles the sexes play in society and in language. Language thus has a big role to play in promoting education and in enhanced educational services. Where women are perceived as passive listeners, it is difficult for them to actively participate in conversations and dialogue taking place. In addition, the language used in such meetings such as English and /or Kiswahili may not necessary be the one they are acquainted with or proficiency in the language may be lacking because of social, cultural and /or historical background in education. At worst, women's challenge of the men's views is highly disapproved. This makes women conspicuously absent in these meetings. They are either silent or excluded, or their ideas, views and opinion distorted as

feminine. Yet language is universal.

Needless to say, language is a way of expressing the self and females or males need not necessarily have proficiency in the language of expression but to express their views. Furthermore, the issues discussed in such meetings such as food, desks, sanitation (toilets and/or bathrooms construction) general maintenance and cleanliness, boarding (beddings etc) and the provision of books and other equipment do not necessarily require any level of education or a language proficiency test. An average person would make tremendous contribution in any language including sign language for language is but a communicating tool.

Language and gender studies have also focussed greatly on the generic words. In English, studies have focussed on the generic word 'man' and the pronoun 'he' to refer both to the male and female. Other studies have focussed on whether words in a language possess a clear and overt semantic marker of masculinity, femininity or generic aspects (Smith, 1985; Wango, 1998a). For example, Graham (1975) established that in material written for children, 'he' was overwhelmingly masculine. What might have been generic reference at the beginning emerged as male. For example, in a random sample of 940 citations of 'he', only 3% could be interpreted in the generic sense. In a study of the generic, masculine and feminine words in Gikuyu (Wango, 1998a: 95), the following was noted:

Table 5.1: Words use summary in a Study

	No .of words	Prestigious (positive)	No prestige (negative)
Generic	13	9	4
Masculine	24	21	3
Feminine	35	23	12
Total	**72**	**53**	**19**

From the study, it was evident that feminine words outnumbered masculine words by 35:24. However, masculine words with positive prestige outnumbered feminine words by a ratio of 21:23. It was clearly evident that few of the

masculine words had negative prestige. This difference was clearly manifested by the fact that feminine words with negative connotation (no prestige) outnumbered masculine words by a ratio of 12:3 in spite of the number of feminine /masculine words. A slightly large number of overtly marked masculine words have been noted that are sometimes used in a generic sense while a smaller number of overtly marked feminine words used in a generic sense has been noted (Smith, 1985; Wango, 1998a). However, the feminine words often have no prestige (negative) unlike the masculine ones which have prestige (positive) when used (Smith, 1985; Wango, 1998a, 1998b).

Another way in which the degree of sexism and gender bias in language can be determined is in the analysis of word order/phrases in a text sample. The most common [female male] and [male female] pairings in a language are studied and their frequency in use in a text (Smith, 1985; Poynton, 1989; Wango, 1998a). Gender biased phrasing has an adverse impact on a large segment of society especially when it gives prominence to certain persons and not others (Smith, 1985; Poynton. 1989). It is another asymmetry that shows the way women and men are represented in the order given to both when referred to together (Smith, 1985:47). Studies have found out there seems to be a particular order in the use of phrases. Such examples can be found in such pairs as [man and woman] [boy and girl] [sons and daughters] [uncles and aunts] [male and female] [father and mother] [brothers and sisters] [he and she]. In many cases, it seems procedural to use the order [male female] or [boy girl] and not [female male] or [girl boy]. This text uses these pairs interchangeably.

Such parings have been studied (Smith, 1985; Poynton, 1989). A study of the Gikuyu language revealed the following (Wango, 1998a:103):

Table 5.2:   *Word Order / Phrase Summary*

Type of phrase	Number of phrases	Frequency
[Female Male]	26	41
[Male Female]	24	178
Total	50	219

Out of the 50 phrases with [female male] [male female] pairings studied, 26

were [female male] while 24 were [male female]. This would seem to suggest that such pairings have no gender bias. However, the contrary is true in actual (normal) language use as evident from *Table 5.2* in that [male female] pairings far much outnumbered [female male] pairings by a ratio of 178: 41. Thus the pairings in actual language use were in favour of the male.

Though little has been studied in terms of the social and psychological significance in the order of word pairs, it is a known fact that women often come second (Smith, 1985). Studies in language and gender have argued that the connotation of other ordered word pairs such as good - bad, rich - poor, life - death, white - black responsible -irresponsible, moral - immoral validates the need for an evaluation of such pairings. This is because it would seem to signify to the reader or listener that females have less status or importance than males and that males are more valued (Smith, 1985). Besides, there is no reason linguistically whatsoever why such phrases cannot be used interchangeably if the meaning is the same.

PART 6: ENGENDERING LANGUAGE

Sex in the first instance is the result of a general consensus about certain characteristics: physical, biological, behavioural or otherwise that distinguishes men from women. Such characteristics are human characteristics and not sex specific. They include such traits as: humble, aggressive, passive, energetic, shyness and others. In terms of endearment, words and expressions of affection, women are often referred to as babes, sweet, chicks, rose flower, old lady, spinster, and pretty dolls or simply as dolls. Men are seen as strong, energetic, tough, enduring and aggressive while women are seen as humble, cowardly, weaklings and passive. Males are often depicted as daring while females are caring. In class, such depiction is deceiving and would not be encouraging the girls. Though language simply reflects society attitudes and reinforces already existing stereotypes and bias, it is both organic and dynamic. It grows and changes modifying existing words and adding new ones to the vocabulary. It is in the change in attitude and in the dynamism of language that change should be directed.

Naming is essentially a matter of lexis (Poynton, 1989:12). It often involves a word or words. A name is simply a title. It identifies a person. It is also a symbol that stands for the unique combination of characteristic and attributes that define a person as an individual (Smith, 1985:38). Thus when a speaker makes a choice between any of the words or chooses to use a particular phrase, the speaker often makes a choice as different from another. Mugo (1975) notes that most societies in the world have certain stereotypical (negative) images of females that suggest negativism, weakness and /or inborn stupidity. It is such words that we must be conscious of and avoid them in order to avoid perpetuating such inherent attitudes and stereotypes.

Language is part of the culture and reflects the cultural and societal aspects including the values and norms, divisions and beliefs of the community. A people's thinking, whether conscious or unconscious is moulded by the language as people express themselves in it and the world is thus revealed in

the language. Language therefore tends to promote and enhance such social values.

Many questions thus arise in regard to language. For example, who makes the language? What is correct language? According to Chomsky, the correctness of a language lies with the native speaker. *But there **are certain structures that** can be changed. These include, for example, the phrasing [male female] in textbooks, in speech and in writing. This can consciously be alternated in a text. For example, the phrasing for [female male] and [male female] has been continuously interchanged in this paper. This is also true of other structures and recommendations can be and should be made in such areas where change can be immediate and result oriented.

Naming which is a matter of words often involves a choice of a particular word as different from another. Choices at times can be sought and/or made especially where they exist (see *Appendix 1*). For example, generic 'man' and 'he' should be sparingly used and 'female' 'male' and 'she' 'he' should be used as appropriate to refer to the specific sex. Pronouns 'you' and 'they' can replace 'he' and 'man' when the sex is not specific. Other words such as person, individual and people can be used for general reference. In addition, other words such as chairperson or simply chair can be used to replace chairman since there is no need to necessarily refer to the sex of the chair. Words like house help can be used instead of houseboy or house girl since the duties assigned have nothing to do with the sex of the individual (*Appendix I*). Common nouns such as farmer, doctor, nurse, pilot and others should not be inclined to any gender.

For example:

EX 12: *The farmer / pilot and his wife. Instead, use: The man and his wife so that the farmer / pilot is not confined to any gender or The couple.*

EX 18: *Behind every successful man is a woman use instead: Behind every successful person is the spouse so that success is an overall achievement.*

EX 20: *Girls have difficulty in maths and sciences Instead use Students have difficulty in maths and sciences.*

EX 21: Girls perform poorly in maths and sciences Instead use: Students perform poorly in maths and sciences.

EX 28: Girls (women) like crying Use instead: Crying is normal / crying is an emotion.

Patterns of sex differences mirror and reinforce gender inequalities evident in other faults of female male relations in which they are a part (Tucker and Bryan, 1957; Ventola, 1979, Subbs, 1983; Smith, 1985). Consequently, the way people use and respond to language in relation to gender is typical of other reactions that people need to modify.

For example,

EX 24: Girls do not have to go to school.

EX 25: Girls cannot grasp such hard concepts (in Physics, Chemistry or other subjects).

Such statements are common in ordinary speech and in common use. Education is a human right, not a gender inclination, yet it has a cultural orientation. The misconception that certain subjects or concepts are difficult reflects a lack of appropriate information and perception of the teaching learning process and hence these statements tend to distort the reality. They are used often and in total disregard to the kind and type of effect they have especially on the girl child in the school and in education. Such an attitude stems from socialisation, a practice that includes our cultural inclinations and inbuilt attitude (whether conscious or unconscious). This is transferred into schools, the classroom, teaching and learning methods and this includes textbooks.

Books that have been offered in Literature in English course work often have the male as the main character. These include novels, short stories, and drama. This could inadvertently discourage the girls and females as the hero is the male, thus excluding the females. It would be as if there were no heroines, for example, as in The River and the Source. The River and the Source stands out as unique since it has a female character and heroine among the many books that have recently been on offer at the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE). School

Table 6.1.   Common Texts in Kenyan Curriculum and Main Characters

Title	Main Character
Novels	
The River and the Source	Female - Akoko
Mine Boy	Male - Xuma
The Mayor of Casterbridge	Male - Michael
So Many Hungers	Female - Kajoli
No Longer At Ease	Male - Obi Okonkwo
The Concubine	Male - Ekwueme
Things Fall Apart	Male - Okonkwo
A Grain of Wheat	Male - Gikonyo
In the Castle of my Skin	Male - Boy Blue
Carcass for Hounds	Male - Haraka
Plays / Drama	
The Burdens	Male - Wamala
The Floods	Male - Bwogo
Betrayal in the City	Male - Jusper
The Government Inspector	Male - Hlestakov
Romeo And Juliet	Male - Romeo
Julius Caesar	Male - Julius Caesar
Short Stories	
Short Stories: African Short Stories, An Anthology	
Resurrection	Female - Mavis
Weekend of Carousal	Male - Mutale
A Man Can Try	Male - Pa Demba
A Silent Song	Male - Mbane
Blankets	Male - Choker
The Master of Domvlei	Male - Mfukeri
Short Stories: The Winner and Other Short Stories	
The Stranger	Male - The Stranger
The Smoke	Male - Akivambo
A Prescription	Male - Mr. Doggret
Transition	Male - Amri
The Coming of Power	Male - Yakubu Kihoro
Short Stories: Looking for a Rain God and Other Stories	
Mista Courifer	Male - Courifer
The Tom Veil	Male - Kwame Asante
Uncle Ben's Choice	Male - Uncle Ben
The Case of the Prison Monger	Male - Gudu
The Toilet	Female - Mholo
The Refugee	Female - Abiyo

Further analysis of the above reveals the following:

Table 6.2.   Summary of Female and Male Characters in Texts

Type of Book	Female Characters	Male Characters	Total
Novel	2	8	10
Drama / Play	-	6	6
Short Stories	3	14	17
Total	**5**	**28**	**33**

Out of the 10 novels, only two have females as the main character while none of the plays has the female as the main character. Only 3 of the 17 short stories have the female as the heroine. This makes the world appear male.

People must therefore pay particular attention to the words they use in common day language and in social relations (Poynton, 1989; Oduol, 1990; Obura, 1991). Language must be used to establish and maintain strong and positive relations, values, beliefs and attitudes. This is most crucial especially in schools that should be central focal points for challenging gender and societal stereotypes. Educationalists, curriculum developers, authors and publishers, researchers, school managers, head teachers, teachers, parents and other stakeholders need to effectively challenge and rectify gender stereotypes.

Language and the words in use give a clue to the placement of male and females in society. They constitute a means whereby women are kept in their place and firmly implanted there. Language, no doubt, propagates the societal values, beliefs and attitudes. There is an obvious need no doubt for change in society. Since the social organisation has been woven to support and substantiate male supremacy, there is need to reconstruct and dislodge these beliefs, values and attitudes. Language is an ingredient to this change. Change must begin with the use of language that does not necessarily antagonise people in society especially the females. This must be language and words that are both selective and that promote the females as human beings. It must be language that is focused on the human person and not generalised on the sex of the individual. Any description of the characteristics, traits or other attributes of the individual

must be confined to the individual and not the sex. This way, positive change will come by.

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PART 7:   SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This paper sought to examine the social semiotics of language, education and gender. It argues that words and other forms of communication such as pictures, illustrations and art are very important, not just as the basis of speech and writing but also as the essence of communication. In the formal curriculum, language is a means of communication and languages are by themselves a part of the curriculum to be taught and examined in the curriculum. Language therefore cannot be ignored in education. Yet in the analysis of language and the words as text and in context, it is clear that languages possesses clear marking for feminine, masculine and generic aspects. In most cases both sexes tend to use words in the same way. Such perpetuates sexism in language and maintains the status quo thus propagating the wrong concept that the two sexes are different and especially validates the male as of greater importance and value and the female as of lesser importance.

Certain words also exclude women and men. Words referring to men and women have different connotations, both negative and positive, and prestige. Even when certain terms or words that exclude either sex are understood to be generic, the ambiguity of intention cannot be resolved since certain terms exclude either sex as text and in context. Consequently, certain masculine and feminine terms have equivalents while others do not. When viewed in a social semiotic framework, this reflects an ideology of gender in which certain social aspects are seen with a gender bias, a fact that is reinforced by the prominence given in word order and which shows the extent to which language is sexist. Also, feminine and masculine terms have different evaluative loadings referring to their respective gender. Notable among them are the number of words with positive prestige referring to either sex as compared to words with negative prestige.

In order for women to contribute effectively towards building a positive image for themselves in society and to improve the status of girls' education, language needs to be redefined. Issues raised in regard to social (cultural) life trace this

to the patriarchal social system (Poynton, 1989; Kabira, 1994; Masheti, 1994). Notwithstanding, women occupy a subordinate place in many systems and are socialized to accept their place. Language propagates the societal values that have been normalised. It may be the case therefore that there is need for change in societal attitudes and in language use. In this view, we conclude that the languages need to be redefined. The social organization has been woven to support and substantiate male superiority and female inferiority. For this reason, there is need for a reconstruction of beliefs and values to dislodge this prejudice and lay it to rest.

While research into this topic no doubt contributes to language, discourse, and sexist discourse (Poynton, 1989; Cameron, 1990; Tannen, 1993; Wango, 1998a), it should hopefully represent an inevitable departure from a simple pursuit of knowledge. It contributes greatly to language, education and gender. In particular, it should make clear certain language and social aspects from which the social semiotic framework of any society is based on. Work dwelling on women and those undertaken by women or men on language or other aspects of society must therefore reflect in Cameron's words (1990:3) to a greater or lesser extent, the influence of feminism and foreground issues of gender difference and male dominance in society. Thus, the language and educational gender aspects this paper addresses should form a starting point for educators and teachers. That is, it should be used as a guide to redress the balance. Recommendations made in respect of this and other such studies should take this into consideration.

It is clearly evident from this paper that language and words in particular plays a very significant role in meaningful communication especially among the laymen who are not trained as Linguists. The choice and use of words and language should be taken seriously especially the semantics and the connotations embedded in each word either as text or in context. This, it may be argued, is a significant step towards improving language and thus influencing and instilling positive change and attitudes, not just for its own sake but for the sake of fairness to all social groups especially women who are a majority of the population and in the promotion of education which is a

human right. In education in particular, language forms the basis of learning. It is at the core of the entire learning process that is dependent on it. Even after school, language remains a part of us in our everyday communication.

Issues raised therefore are of importance to all members of society and should not be confined to feminism, feminists and to research. In particular, they should be of particular concern to parents, educators, and to the media % because they are the primary agents of society in the socialization of children into these institutionalised and propagated attitudes. Children learn their initial categories from parents and educators. The media continues to propagate the same at the advanced stages and beyond. Children hear and read words and they eventually internalise them. These words become their words and the attitudes embedded in them are adopted as the social norm.

To feminists, the issues raised should be used as a basis to press for greater reforms in schools, including in the publication of books and national broadcasts and for use in gender awareness and gender training programmes. To researchers, more research should be undertaken in the languages with the aim of investigating sexism in language and improving on such imbalance if any. This is particularly so taking into account the fact vernacular languages are the basis of study in the first three years of school in most parts of the country. For as argued in this paper, there is need to know what it is we teach our children to think and feel about themselves, about each other and others, and use the means by which they learn so to improve such attitudes. This is because words are the most accessible part of language to both the linguists and the non-linguists and it is words that carry meaning. Any bias among social groups and/or the sexes in any given society is bound to be transmitted during normal conventions in language. This is also taking into consideration the fact that the use of a word or words involves certain choices and not others (Halliday & Hasan, 1989).

The study does acknowledge efforts made by others in relation to language and gender and various suggestions of contributing to education in Kenya including scholars and researchers as well as the government (Republic of Kenya, 1964, 1965, 1998, 1999). Scholars have also linked education to various facets of

social economic and political development (Njoroge and Bennaars, 1986; Otiende, Wamahiu and Karugu, 1992). For example, it reiterates Oduol's (1990) recommendation that people should therefore pay particular attention to the kind of language they use in relationships. This is because as argued in this paper, language establishes and identifies their ideological stance, that is, beliefs, values and attitudes and thus the meaning of whatever they say will be derived from the actual choices that they make in using languages. The underlying argument is that the use and choice of language and words is not entirely random in that it is related to the context of the speaker, the goal and or purpose of the talk. The beliefs, attitudes and values are also implicates. This is true of people in influential positions such as teachers, parents, in the media (radio and newspapers), adults, and publishers in the choice of words, co-occurrence of phrases and use of expressions. The selection must therefore be absolute.

Schools are a central focal point for challenging gender and societal stereotypes. Educators, curriculum developers, teachers, school management, authors and publishers need to be able to effectively challenge and rectify these stereotypes (Obura, 1991). This is only possible through an unbiased school-learning environment. This encompasses the physical environment of the school and include the curriculum, classroom dynamics, the teaching and riming environment, language and the facilities provide for in the school. The fruits of such will then spill into society and in the social-economic environment.

The analysis adopted in this study also constitutes a radical change from general semantics to the social semiotics that is more dynamic, sociolinguistic and more experiential and language use oriented. Investigations conducted along these lines have resulted in an ultimate description of a more cultural but linguistic nature. This should be the way to describe language, that is, language in use. This is the way we must look at language in relation to education and gender and relate to social economic political development.

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APPENDIX 1: Gendered and Selected Improved Wordings

Chairman / lady	-	Chair / Chairperson
Club master / mistress	-	Club patron
Father / Mother	-	Parent
Girlfriend / boyfriend	-	Friend / Fiancée
Girl / boy	-	Child / pupil / student
Grounds man	-	Compound cleaner
He	-	Person
His	-	The definite article 'the'
Himself / herself		The self
Headmaster / headmistress	-	Head teacher / Principal
House girl / boy	-	House help
Husband / wife	-	Spouse
Maid	-	House help
Man	-	Person/ people
Manager / manageress	-	Management
Manpower	-	Personnel
Man & Woman, Husband & Wife	-	Couple
Master / mistress on duty	-	Teacher on duty
Men	-	People / Everybody
Office girl / boy	-	Office assistant
Policeman / woman	-	Police officer
Shamba boy / girl	-	Gardener
Watchman	-	Security / guard