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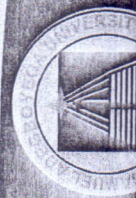
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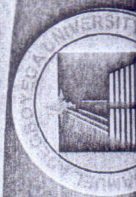
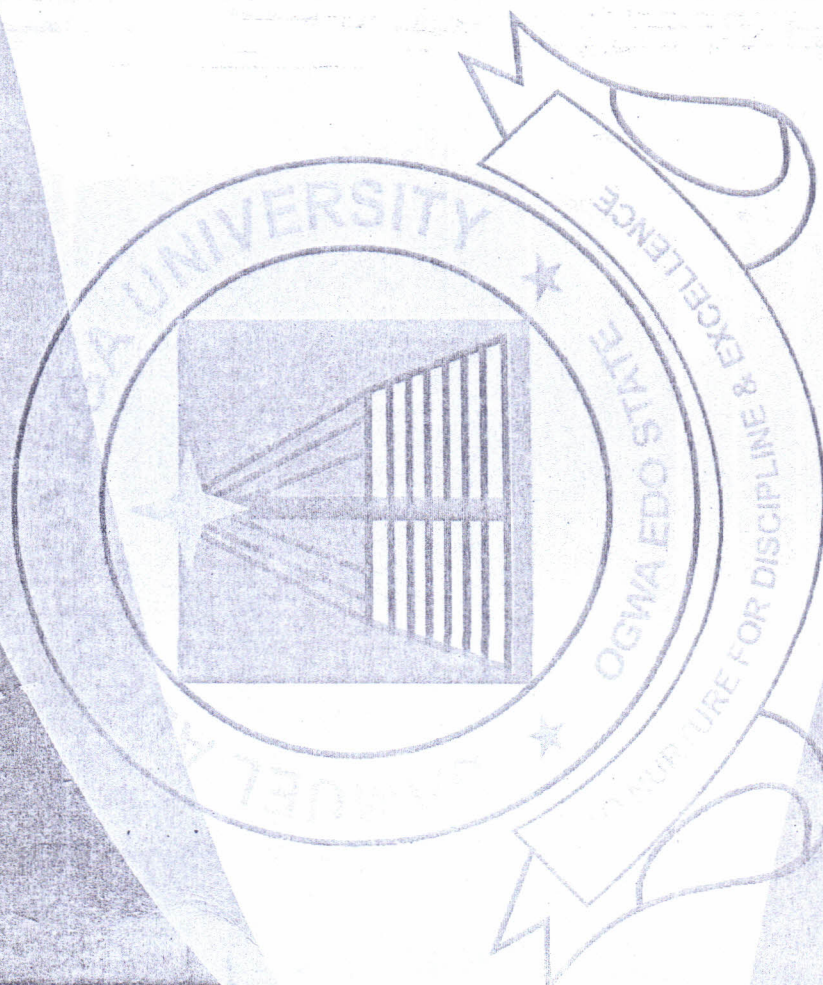


Volume 5, Number 1 & 2 June/December, 2017



SAU JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES

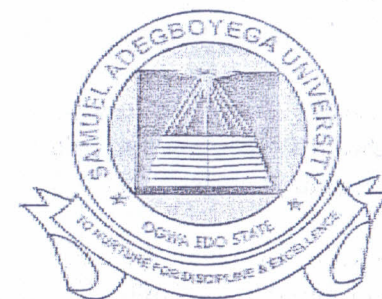
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SAU JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES



VOLUME 5, NUMBER 2
JUNE, 2017

A PUBLICATION OF COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES,
SAMUEL ADEGBOYEGA UNIVERSITY, OGWA,
EDO STATE

Exploration of The Women Folk Challenges in Julie Okoh's *The Mannequins*

Oludolapo Ojediran

Abstract

Julie Okoh's The Mannequins (1997), presents female characters that appeal for female solidarity and decisiveness which can challenge the convictions, norms, traditions and codes of behaviours they have been forced to imbibe through their depiction as dolls. Through textual analysis, the playwright presents a gendered society whereby a female gender can negotiate, navigate and express herself without causing problem. Although, the play elaborates the issue of power and powerlessness of the female characters, it also sees that silence is not necessarily negative, or form of weakness. However, the play concludes that women should always work together, help themselves, get educated and be people of value in every sphere of life especially in the public domain.

Keywords: Exploration, Women Folk, Challenges, *Mannequins*

Introduction

Julie Okoh's *The Mannequins* is a metaphor of female representation and change within a patriarchal society. Her presentation in the play shows women are represented as individuals who are able to abandon their domesticated and socio-cultural views of gender to take up the challenges of fighting for their freedom. The belief that gender divides both sexes to attain

silence and audibility is well explored in this play. While audibility is often regarded as one of the main attributes of the male gender, silence is the epitome of the female gender whose honour is tied to the way she behaves in the society. Silence, however, is a long tradition in the history of femininity especially in any patriarchal society. A woman is expected to remain silent, polite, cautioned and respectful in any patriarchal society that sees the female as the second sex.

To reiterating Walker's (1984, p.xii) view of the female gender[where] as people in pursuit of more knowledge, Julie Okoh, as a female playwright, tries to disabuse the society's mind from seeing the female gender as a decorated property, doll and a mannequin. This is because she sees them as people that need to be heard and not spoken for, people that can actively participate in any socio-cultural discussion. As seen in the works of writers like Spender (1989), Cameron (1998), Elgin (2000), who have defined silence as the extent to which women's voices are heard or silenced by the sexism of a society as a whole. Apart from analysing the silence of the female gender in the play, Okoh also recognises that women have been and are still slighted because they do not occupy the same linguistic status with men in public discourse. Using the metaphors of silence and audibility, this paper explores women's ability to either be able to speak out against or their ability to condone the unpleasantness of the unjust socio-cultural and historio-political issues associated with patriarchal society that do not allow them act on their own volition. Such situations either make or mar the women's future as those who speak out against[what?]are seen as rebels and those who obey are defined by their limitations.

Okoh's play explores that the denial of the woman's voice is the denial of her personal freedom and meaningful interrelatedness with others since the avenue to communicate effectively has been destroyed. Although, this is evidenced in the play which sees audaciousness as a vital instrument towards achieving female autonomy, Okoh shows that women need some level of persuasion in order to attain the audible level in any male dominated society. The concept of audaciousness is present in the

play's thematic analysis which exposes the issue of silence and audibility and how the playwright toyed with such to redress female identity, women's position in the society, gender relationships, sexual autonomy and self-expression.

Voiced or Silenced Language

Language is a way through which the playwright's thought are passed across through the character's lines. Language tells a lot about a character in the play which makes readers and audience understand it. In order to be an effective communication, the playwright must write in a way that the intending reader will understand every bit of it else the message of the writing will be lost. However, while the language in *The Mannequins* is simple, its presentation tells a lot about the female gender who is seen as a doll in a society that most people do not respect woman. Okoh creates a binary use of language through her female characters who are either voiced or silenced. Voiced language are given to the female characters who are able to challenge the existing social norms that affects women while the silenced language is seen through the mute attitude of women who are unwilling to change their passive positions. Through language use, Okoh's play challenges the readers to scrutinise the assumptions about gender and power. Her play sees language as a powerful tool and significant indicator that could help the female gender within the society to be seen outside of their expectations or stereotypes. The idea that women are more conservative, naturally cautious and reserved is re-addressed in Okoh's writing as she presents the affirmative and independent woman who is not docile.

The issue of breaking away from women's traditional role is analysed in Okoh's portrayal of Mrs Adudu, who, at the end of the play, realises that her being a wife and a mother holds no value for the society and the husband she has adored despite his infidelity. Mrs. Adudu at first is seen as a woman whose perception about marriage institution is mainly for procreation in order to express one's femininity and to carry on with the husband's lineage. However, despite Mrs. Adudu's view about marriage, Mr. Adudu's character depicts the society's contempt for and

disregard of womanhood through his preference to share all his secrets with a male friend, Mr. Igberaese, rather than with his wife. Okoh reveals this in the character of Mr. Adudu's friend, who walks into their bedroom uninvited, starts a conversation with Mr. Adudu and changes the topic when Mrs. Adudu comes back into the room. While both friends switched to the situation of Everytown people who need water desperately instead of the wasteful spending on women by Mr. Adudu, Mrs Adudu is highly concerned about the peoples' plight. In Mrs. Adudu's innocence, she demonstrates the caring nature of a woman, by showing her concern for these people, urging her husband to help because she knows he is capable of doing it. The moment she leaves the room, Igberaese cautions his friend's unwise spending as a means of getting a woman's attention to himself since he is a man who believes in polygamy as an acceptable social way of life for an African man.

Okoh portrays Mr. Igberaese as a man who tries in vain to stop his friend's infidelity. She presents him as a man with a moralist consciousness protecting Mrs. Adudu's interest in her absence; yet he advises his friend to marry a second wife if he is not satisfied with his legally married wife. He sees Mr. Adudu as a man "lost in the wind of change" (18) under the pretence of civilization. Like the character of Ato Lawson in Aidoo's *The Dilemma of a Ghost*, who is torn between two diverse cultural heritages, Mr. Adudu deroots himself by not marrying another wife in the pretence of civilisation. He has lots of mistresses to satisfy his sexual desire, which corresponds with the social belief in polygamy and men's infidelity as an accepted social norm. In Mr. Adudu's view, his friend is a worthless man by not accepting and condoning his way of life:

MR. ADUDU: Look! You are becoming a jigger in my toes. I can't even step on the ground again. Be reasonable my friend! Man is man, ancient or modern. Ehenh! Who wants to retire from active service at my age? Man must learn to be

active. After all variety is the spice of life (19).

The playwright's representation of Mr. Adudu does not only show a man who is not interested in women's emotional, financial, or psychological emancipation, the play portrays the mental domestication perpetuated on the female gender who accepts man's infidelity as part of the cultural norms in a patriarchal society. This is expressed by Okoh's use of Mrs. Adudu's marital plight to explore and publicise the effects of men's infidelity on women, home and the society at large as most seems to condole such an act. Okoh sees such marital maltreatment as what makes a woman suffer from psychological violence and trauma.

One of Okoh's descriptions of the female gender is summarised by Mrs. Adudu's language that views women as doll babies, which substantiates her husband's lines about men being sexually active as he is. The men's active mindset enables them to believe that women are merchandise, which explains Mrs. Adudu's analysis of a young girl being cuddled, loved, and played with, but when she becomes old, she is abandoned, neglected and abused like the way the young girl abandons the doll babies when she is more matured. Such doll babies receive occasional cuddles which shows Mrs. Adudu's plight in her matrimonial home. As the female characters in the play present stereotypes of women in different societal class, oppression is seen through their sexual subjectivity, cultural representation, educational ignorance and personal mindset. While these female characters are presented as sexually less important in the analysed play except for their sexual and reproductive capabilities, they are seen as examples of women who show realistic portraits of women in active search of a voice. In Okoh's writing, most female characters are represented as liberating forces who acknowledge the importance of their sexuality and autonomy. Their behaviour mirrors Wood's (2005, p.279) assertion that in combining conventional femininity (sexuality) and masculinity (weapons and violence), women challenge the sex/gender and personifies erotic fantasies that

merge sex and power. For example, in *Edewede* (2000), the coming together of women help them to realise that they can combine their own feminine attributes with that of masculine weapons in order to propose a change to their existing situation. The women use their bottom power and the masculine attribute of assertive language to ignite public sentiment about women's fragility and vulnerability. This mirrors Kristeva's (1982) view that women need use language to their own advantage in order to acknowledge their feminine experiences and present it in new ways. By using language, these women destabilise the phallic system of operation through their clitoral autonomy.

Education as a Means of Liberating Women

Education is an avenue through which women can gain audibility within the society to a large extent. This is because a learned woman is difficult to be relegated to the background in modern day Nigeria[Is this play all about Nigerian women and men?]. Education gives most women stability, recognition and value within and outside their families. While family is known to be the starting point of the marginality they go through, it is also a means through which the female gender can get educated. Olademo (2013) observes that:

Education refers to the process of learning and acquiring information. Education includes not only cognitive and intellectual learning, it is also the learning of skills and work-related competencies. More broadly, it includes moral and ethical issues, values, attitudes, religion, spiritualism, art and more (36-7).

In *The Mannequins*, education is seen as a way of rejecting man's exploitation. Through Eriaye's education, Eriaye's believes in herself as a woman that can attain greater heights instead of believing in Mr. Adudu's promises. Her believe in self-worth makes her view an educated person as someone who can think clearly, act accordingly and follow self-made goals that can add

value to his/her life. The character of Eriaye from the beginning is represented as a woman with a voice, who believes in keeping her dignity from men like Mr. Adudu who wants to acquire women by luring them with money and material things. While Eriaye's advocates for woman's education as a means of liberation which makes her assertive, expressive and powerful through language, her counterpart, Bharo sees otherwise. She expresses this to a male colleague who is stunned at her determination and her unyielding attitude to sexual male advances.

ERIAYE: I've always wanted to be able to look at the world around me and paint it in words or in images. (p. 30)

Eriaye intends to gain more audibility rather than the economic value placed on femalehood in some parts of West African countries that view femininity as a means of getting financial gain by being married out especially to the highest bidder. Such females are either sold out into marital slavery to the highest bidder either with love or not, or they are often exploited domestically which invariably makes them dolls in the society. Okoh explores determined female characters whose refusal to allow this retrogressive masculine acquisition inhibit their fight against patriarchal system that devalues femininity.

Bharo is the third female character presented in the play whose behaviour is a sharp contrast to Eriaye's. Bharo is depicted as a woman with a mindset of accepting her stereotyped domestic role in the society. She is voiceless from the beginning of the play as she is seen as Mr Adudu's mistress, she believes in polygamy and the respects of husband's rights. Her illiteracy and unwillingness to learn is being mocked by everybody in the office; rather she believes in having a rich husband who will satisfy her financial and material needs. As she sees this as the ultimate of any woman, Eriaye's view of femininity is contrary to Bharo's. Both female characters difference are exposed in a discussion with Bharo and her colleagues:

BHARO: Right again. And I have been to Italy, to France, to Japan, to India, to America and to the continent. I can even boast that I know England more than most Englishers.

EMIATOR: You mean Englishmen?

BHARO: Englishmen or Englanders, that's not my business. My interest is in their money and their shops. When I finish my business, I return home. . . .

EKATA: Bharo, your legs blue, today (appropriate colour of pantyhose). Did you dye them?

BHARO: You mean I'm wearing emh-emh-emh.

EMIATOR: A pair of panty-hose

BHARO: Yes, yes. That's what they called it. The latest design in Oxfordstreet. . . .(32).

Bharo's use of incorrect English language can be viewed from two different angles. On the one hand, Bharo's language is that of an uneducated illiterate, unassertive and passive woman who only tries to impress through her dressing and acquired feminine acceptability, while on the other hand, she tries to incorporate herself into the public domain by speaking English despite not being correct. She reduces the esteem associated with English language as a man's public language of superiority that tends to make other language speakers irrelevant or silent. This mirrors Cameron (1995,p.4) that:

Even where it seems that women could speak if they chose, the conditions imposed on their lives by the society may make this a difficult or dangerous choice. Silence can also mean censoring yourself for fear of being ridiculed, attacked, or ignored.

Cameron's (1995) view of female's silence and linguistic acceptability is depicted in Bharo's character whereby her feminine view is placed on the fear and mockery of her being and language. Her intelligence is measured by the way she

communicates, speaks and also in the passive characterisation through the interaction with her boss and other colleagues. Okoh does not only reveal the acceptance of femininity, silence and audibility by some females and how they strive for recognition, she also explores the economic and political situation and the labour market of the country in question whereby the acquisition of certificates and experience does not matter in promotion but whom the staff members know at the point of deciding who should be promoted. Bharo's connection with the her boss reveals the working place injustice being perpetuated amongst the working class in situations where femininity is sometimes used as a yardstick for promotion as long as these females can succumb to the male sexual advances. In such instances, femininity is used to measure labour and production which disallows some females and males to have their rewards or promotions at the appointed time like Ekata notices in his words.[Please, define your focus very well. You mix too many things up. Ekata sees this as a form of male victimisation which is hardly noticed by women writers as such oppression makes these male gender become victims of their own laws within the society. This reveals that not only the females suffer in patriarchal system, the male gender also does as Bharo's inability to tell her colleagues where she gets all the money she uses on her expensive travelling and lifestyle irritates Ekata who sees the economic collapse and also sees her as:

EKATA: I pity you. You are all body but no soul. Just like the mannequins in the supermarket. They look so attractive you think they are human beings. But have a close look at them, they are nothing but dead bodies (34).

Okoh's view of female voicelessness is summarised by Ekata who sees a woman with Bharo's attributes to be a decorated mannequin in the supermarket because she will ever remain silent but decorated with different accessories at one point in time. Such mannequins or women with Bharo's attribute cannot voice out their grievances because they are mere dolls being given what the male dominated society seems fit them at that stage. Ekata feels

irritated by such behaviour and he is always ready to antagonise any woman he meets, which is reflected in his language choice that shows the knowledge he has about women's vulnerable position in the society. He believes every woman is the same, with what she sees of Bharo in the office who can hardly communicate in the public language (English) and has no certificate but will always get promoted on time and never lacks anything since she knows the people in authority.

EKATA: What else can one do? Words are the poor man's only weapon. Even though they fall on deaf ears, we'll keep on talking. There is so much death. To be silent is like helping to dig graves for more corpses . . . (25).

Okoh uses Ekata's word at this point to debate the danger of women's silence which she expresses metaphorically that silence is like digging one's grave, she publicises the masculine gender's hypocrite behaviour that helps a woman gets what she wants if she obeys their sexual advances and punishes the unyielding ones. Ekata's view of the feminine gender as greedy, indecisive and powerless is seen as a result of his thirteen year old sister who dies from the complications of abortion due to Vesico Vaginal Fistula (V.V.F). Although Ekata's sister's story as narrated in *The Mannequins* baffles Eriaye a bit, she is at the same time aware of different odd situations women experience at various forms and levels which can hardly be avoided and at the long run one becomes the victim of one's silence.

The playwright uses her female characters' language to problematise women's position within the society as it reveals how the patriarchal system silences women through the words they use because it regard the female gender as people, who should not be heard. However, this expresses that when women are seen in the society, they are seen through the extreme act of rebellion, violence and attempt to actively speak out against different forms of oppression[?]. There is a sense of constant disapproval in Mr. Adudu's confidence which the playwright has done by constructively placing Eriaye to challenge his words, 'no

matter how tall and big you grow your mind would never know peace until you become the property of a man' (43). In this vein, Mr. Adudu is depicted as a man who so much believes that women are mere properties and that the domestic domain which makes most women silent is a natural role that she should not be challenged. This puts the woman in a position of marginality. Although Eriaye's assertive and audible character is seen with negativity by Mr. Adudu, Okoh uses *The Mannequins* to expose the stance of women in the society which corresponds with Bharo's patriarchal belief in her gender.

Furthermore, apart from placing Eriaye and Bharo in two different linguistic platforms, whereby they are characterise as powerful and powerless individuals, the playwright also uses binary characterisation of placing two opposite female characters beside each other. This symbolises the view of female silence and audibility in a way to create the balance as portrayed in the play. Such also help readers to understand the social status and stand of each female character distinctively. However, this allows a critical analysis of their personalities as being pro or against the patriarchal culture.

Meanwhile, Mr. Adudu's nature can be seen from almost the same perspective that wishes to dominate the female gender; Mrs. Adudu and Eriaye represent the marginalised, the other, and the repressed women in any society as analysed by the playwright who uses these characters plights to summarise that of other women from any sphere or level of life. Their otherness exposes other women to be cautious of their present situations and to make amendments where need be to become active members of the community. Although, making these changes requires lot of commitment and sacrifices as de Beauvoir (1952) notices which is reanalysed by Pilcher and Whelehan (2004, p.90) that:

Women do not regain the status of being 'the one', according to de Beauvoir, because they largely accept this state of affairs. The woman may fail to claim the status of subject because she lacks definite resources, because she feels the

necessary bond that ties her to man regardless of reciprocity and because she is often very well pleased with her role as the other.

De Beauvoir offers different ways that make women accept their position of 'other' in places where gender roles function in line with their responsibilities. In relation to the playwright, such responsibilities include women's reproductive capacities which Okoh analyses in some of her female characters as discussed earlier. Rather than seeing the 'Otherness' of the female gender as a means that silences them and sets them up against a life time of inferiority which some of the female characters try to change, Okoh uses the 'otherness' position to celebrate feminine culture, bodies and sexuality. Although the female characters face the 'other' situation as women and in relation to community centeredness, Walker's womanist theory describes woman's otherness as a means which allows both self-empowerment and affiliation.

Eriaye and Mrs. Adudu are encouraged by their inner ability of expressiveness to become powerful beings and not be seen as dolls. Okoh's placement of Eriaye and Bharo in the same office helps to examine the feminine audibility and silence through the importance of acquiring education in the West African system. While Bharo sees no importance in acquiring education as a means of freedom, or as an avenue to become rich and opportunity of travelling around the continent, Eriaye acknowledges the fact that education breaks a woman's silence, she becomes a force to be reckon with either the society likes it or not, she uses her words and image to correct the society perception of feminine intelligence. Bharo, who is completely immersed in her role as a strict traditional African woman exposes the domesticity of a woman in the society,

BHARO: ... Does a woman need a certificate to know how to keep a good home, comfort her husband and raise children? Our grandmothers never went to school, but they were successful women in their own way. ...

God made man the head of the family. I know my place and I am glad to occupy it. I only pray to come across a rich man to marry me. If when I tell him "Do this" he does it, "do that" and he does it, who am I to complain? ...

So, I too wouldn't mind to sit back and cross my legs in a chair to enjoy the fruits of my husband's labour. Who wouldn't like to be papered (sic) with affluence? (36)

Bharo's words are the observation of two different lives of struggle and affluence. Every woman wants affluence, but not every woman wants to be silenced in the society. This is also noticeable in Eriaye's view, her other reason for education is to become rich and powerful in the society and not be regarded as a liability through any man's acquisition. Eriaye's strength to reject Mr. Adudu's sexual advances show an inner power to change his believe that he can acquire any woman that comes his way.

ERIAYE: Sir, I am neither a pet nor a toy, but a person. A person with flesh and blood. A person with a soul searching for growth and fulfilment. I' can't let you tie me down with wealth. Besides, think of tomorrow. Think of when your athletic strength is dissipated, you can no longer hop from petal to petal, you limbs too like to rise and work. What kind of wife will I be then? Who wants to be an irritable wife with unfulfilled desires? (43)

Eriaye rejects de Beauvoir's view of women as 'other' from the perspective of female reproductive capacities. Okoh does not only explore Eriaye's zeal through her intention to acquire more certificates to change the male view towards female's silence, she also shows the breaking away of the female gender from their domesticity by Eriaye's constant rejection of the societal perception of femininity. Eriaye's attitude mirrors Arinde (2016, p. 145) that women adopt dynamic approach in achieving their missions. This is a bit different from Bharo's characterisation who sees her femininity in line with the society's expectation. Bharo faces a situation of single parenting when Mr. Adudu refuses to accept the pregnancy. She thinks of raising the child as a single mother, but she is constantly reminded by her colleagues of the

danger involve in single parenting especially in Nigeria whereby such a child has no national identity. Ogundipe-Leslie (1994, p.136) views such an exclusive circumstance as an attempt to protect patriarchal interests in the polygamous and flirtatious freedoms of the Nigerian male who wish to create an alternative family outside their wedlock. This is because a woman is not allowed to give the child citizenship which is also an issue explored in the play.

However, Okoh makes Mr Adudu to cause his own downfall which breaks the dichotomous relationship between the two genders. Mr. Adudu is imprisoned for committing social offences. He sleeps with his own 13 years old bastard unknowingly due to his promiscuity, embezzles the money to he ought to use to make water available for Everytown people and the females in the office are encouraged by the males in the office to voice out their problems in a riot against his harassment. Although Bharo confronts the issue of choice as that point in the play whereby she has to decide whether to give her unborn child citizen by fighting him to accept her pregnancy or remain with him as a secret lover, she decides to stay with others who are ready and willing to fight for their rights. Bharo's association with others signifies her interest in motherhood rather than in accepting the lover's plea to abort the pregnancy. Okoh explores motherhood as a means through which women are recognised and esteemed, she also uses the patriarchal structure in the play to transform the timid, shy, immature women into fully grown, mentally developed and sexually intelligent women who are confident enough to question the authority of men and the socio-cultural perspective that view them as dolls.

Conclusion

Okoh's language is simple, understandable and concise in *The Mannequins*. While Okoh has taken time to explore the women situation in the play, her clarity of these female characters in the society which deprives women of many things is not well defined. Okoh displays women as victims of bodily exploitation, deception and persecution in the analysed play which allow some of these

female characters to feel anger, disgust and self-pity that are expressed through the lines. Although they speak in the plays, but the weaker female characters speeches depict their silence, their abandonment and their violation. The stronger female characters display some levels of maturities, vocalisations, powers and determination to correct the dummy positions they have been placed within the societies. However, Okoh's dramatisation is to call the attention of the readers and the general society to the representation of Nigerian women in such male-dominant culture that urgent change is required. This is done in order to give voice to the voiceless which will help to see the womenfolk as beings capable of reasoning, feelings and being assertive.

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The Expanding "Nigerian English Lexicon": Evidence From A Nigerian Professor's Inaugural Lecture

'Kemi Olayemi

Abstract

Since the English language has become a world language having spread to so many parts of the world, it has continued to enjoy various transformations in different socio-cultural contexts within which it finds itself. One of such is the creation of new words to cater for various experiences which the second language user of English wishes to describe as he engages the language in day-to-day communication. This study aims at revealing the morphological processes in which words from both the English and the Yoruba languages become aesthetically woven to produce new strings which are closer in meaning to the original words from which they have been coined. This creation of new words or expressions no doubt helps the enrichment of the English lexicon and also provides the second language user the ease of communication in the language. However, codifying the resulting linguistic forms may pose great challenge to scholars.

1.0 Introduction

The English language is becoming a more important phenomenon in Nigeria's daily life. In the words of McLaughlin (1984:7):

We have become accustomed to the notion that the world is becoming more homogenous, that there is a linguistic convergence, with English gradually becoming the universal language.