

TRANSGENDERISATION AND LANGUAGE PRODUCTION: A PSYCHOLINGUISTIC INVESTIGATION

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Abstract

This paper examines the relationship between gender and language. It seeks to investigate language production and use by a transgender person, to observe transgender discourse produced by Bobrisky, who claimed to have changed his gender from male to female. It is a qualitative study that aims to describe and interpret Bobrisky's speeches. Three video contents were purposely selected from his social media handle. Furthermore, the data for the study is analysed based on the Dominance theory propounded by Robin Lakoff (1975), which challenges the traditional perception of women's communication by Jespersen's deficit theory. The findings from the study reveal that though Bobrisky claims to be a man, his speeches expose his true identity, making the theory an essential tool for determining Bobrisky's gender as a man, since his speech doesn't fit into the basics of the theory. Again, it clearly shows that Bobrisky has deviated from his psychological and biological design as a woman and is only trying so hard to fit into the circle. The study reveals that Bobrisky is caught in a serious identity crisis, for his linguistic mannerisms as well as his use of language betray his new self-imposed gender. His speech shows that he is also assertive, as he states facts rather than opinions and he always enjoys dominance or control of the conversation to gain power.

Keywords: Transgenderisation, Gender, Language, Psycholinguistics, Disorders

1. Introduction

The recent psychological submission by a Social Psychologist, Ojedokun, on the behaviours and mannerisms of Bobrisky that he (Bobrisky) is suffering from dual personality disorders reveals the extent to which the concepts of transgender and transgenderisation demonstrate a complex epistemological and behavioural undertone, requesting a more elaborate and broad analytical tools in the understanding of the concepts. Though related, the two concepts are terms that refer to both the process and the act of being. While transgender is an umbrella term for persons whose gender identity, gender expression or behaviour does not conform to that typically associated with the sex to which they were assigned at birth, transgenderisation, on the contrary, depicts the process of assigning a particular gender to oneself that does not conform to that typically associated with the sex to which they were assigned at birth. Therefore, Bobrisky would be seen as the kind of

person who has undergone the process of transgenderisation, hence falling within the umbrella concept of transgendered persons who assign a particular gender to themselves that does not conform to that associated with the sex to which they were assigned at birth. The implication of this unusual development to the persons and the general public is the emergence of possibilities from the impossible. Of course, Bobrisky might not have undergone full biological changes; however, his behaviour must be manipulated to suit the assigned gender so that his audience believes they are dealing with a person of the female gender. This prompts Bobrisky to adapt his behaviour, his ways of speaking, especially when in public, suggesting that he is both a male and a female. That means that biologically, Bobrisky is a male, and socially and psychologically, s/he identifies as a female.

The s/he syndrome created by Bobrisky's transgenderisation not only depicts a psychological crisis but also that of identity. Bobrisky seems to have presented a critical discursive paradigm whose theorization must align with an identity crisis of neither here nor there. Thus, the conceptualization of this new development via the instrument of language would also amount to a paradigm shift, especially in psycholinguistic studies. Psycholinguistics, being a field that examines mental processes involved in language production, perception and understanding, should seek to interrogate the asymmetrical relations existing between the biological foundation of language and the mental processes involved in the language produced by transgendered persons. This means that rejecting any single explanation of the man as having dual personality disorders must not only generate discussions and /or debates from psychologists but also incite reactions from other sister disciplines. Bobrisky, the popular Nigerian internet personality who cross-dresses and identifies as a woman, has become a prominent figure in discussions about gender identity and expression in Nigeria, using social media to raise awareness and spark conversations about himself and the concept of transgenderism. For instance, the social psychologist Ojedokun views Bobrisky's self-realization as a woman as someone suffering from a dual personality disorder. A psycholinguist would use psycholinguistic tools to examine how this dual personality disorder affects language production, resulting in unique language behaviour. This paper examines whether Bobrisky's transgenderisation of self reflects language disorder and, if so, what type of language disorder, and whether this self-realization has an impact or effect on his language use.

2. The Problematics

This paper aims to examine the relationships between gender and language. The paper is anchored on the premise that the biological foundation must always be in symmetrical relations with language production and use. However, recent developments in gender discourses-both biological and social- have changed the narratives where gender is never considered a natural but a cultural artefact that individuals can assign to themselves, leading to what is known as transgenderisation. It is in the context of this culturally determined gender that this paper seeks to investigate language production and use by a transgender person to observe gender-language conformity or otherwise. This paper therefore, uses Bobrisky's speech and gauges them against his newfound gender to find out symmetrical or asymmetrical relations in the use of language.

3. Trangenderisation as a Socio-Biological Concept

To start with, transgenderization is a complex term that deals with the realization of transgender identity and transition. The concept of transgender is commonly used to denote human beings or people who are neither male nor female. In the Nigerian context and especially in the northern part of the country, they are called '*Yan daudu*', the plural of

'Dan daudu connoting men who behave and act like women. They are strictly distinctive social categories of people (males) who have adopted feminine mannerisms, speech, and dress in Hausa society. In the western sense of the term, Transgenderisation is a concept that is used to interrogate the biological nature of gender. That is to say, it is used to describe the idea that gender is a social and not biological concept, insinuating that being male or female does not have anything to do with the biological composition of a person. An individual may choose to identify as male or female, depending on their personal preference. This development could be associated with the human capacity to change and tamper with the biological structure(s) of a person, thus an individual can be subjected to plastic surgeries in which some of his or her biological organs are changed. Consequently, a person born male may change to a female by replacing his male genital organs with those of a female. Transgenderisation in the context of Western culture is therefore a complete conversion from one's gender to another, both biologically and socially.

Language production and its use by transgender persons may also be subjected to behavioural change, which is made to align and reflect the linguistic features of the new gender. Often, the language should convey aspects such as voice quality, politeness, and politeness strategies, as well as power dynamics associated with the newly identified gender. If, for instance, the newfound gender is female, the voice quality must show femininity, characterized by a thrilling and non-hoarse quality. That is to say, the quality of the voice must demonstrate the size of the vocal cords, which for males is approximately eleven millimetres. At the level of politeness and politeness strategy, we can observe a language that is less aggressive and more submissive, as aggression and submission are the general characteristics of the limbic system, whose dominance in females contributes to their polite speech. Dominance communicated through language is often used to express power relations in any discursive event. The speech of the transgender person will be gauged according to the claims of the Dominance Theory put forward by Lakoff, which identifies certain features or characteristics of women's speech that equally reflect power relations between and among the leader and the led, thus indicating that the leader is a dominant figure exercising power over the led, which is loyal and subservient. These linguistic behaviours will be used as a parameter upon which Bobrisky's speeches will be described in the context of his newfound gender.

4. Gender and Language use

In society, there are two recognised genders, to be specific, men and women, concerning language use and as such, there is a variety of speech used by men and women. Due to the importance of language use and how it varies according to gender, traditionally, within our culture, there is a deeply rooted belief about how men and women are expected to behave and a major part of this is in how we speak or use language. To support this, Sumarsono (2008) states that several factors related to language differences between men and women exist, including voice and intonation factors. It is well known that men and women have different types of voices; the female voice is generally categorized as alto and soprano, while the male voice is categorized as tenor and bass. This is, of course, related to the difference in body organs producing the sounds between men and women. Again, Wardhaugh (1988) posits that there are language differences between men and women. The differences include several linguistic levels with several examples of cases found in the language: (a) phonological differences and (b) differences in the morphological and lexical levels. At this level, Wardhaugh cites the example put forward by Lakoff, stating that in English, women often use colour vocabularies such as mauve, beige, aquamarine, lavender, and magenta, while men do not. English also has a vocabulary that is based on

gender/gender differences, such as actor-actress, waiter-waitress, master-mistress, proprietor-proprietress, and others.

Again, Lakoff asserts that gender is the bottom line of our sense of identity: from a very early age, the question depends on whether we have learned in early childhood that we are a girl or a boy. From the above assertion, it is perhaps part of the reason why adapting to and mastering the language of the new gender poses a kind of hindrance. Lakoff examined conversational management, as well as phonological and grammatical variation, in addition to morphological and lexical differences.

1. Conversational Management

Women are more likely to hold conversations in a more relaxed and informal environment. Women generally use more question forms in conversation and employ more linguistic hedges, such as 'I think' and 'sort of', as well as more listening noises, including 'hmm', and more paralinguistic responses, like smiling and nodding. Some studies indicate that women are more linguistically supportive of interaction -they work harder to maintain and hold the floor, while men generally introduce new topics. Goodwin, Marjorie (1990) observes that girls and women link their utterances to those of previous speakers and develop each other's topics, rather than introducing new topics (as men do). This can be observed in a study conducted by Koczogh Helga Vanda: "Topic shift is the second most common function used by both sexes, while men (36.84%) use 'I mean' with this function more frequently than women (25.92%)." Again, Linguist Pamela Fishman has stated that women do all of the "conversational shitwork".

2. Phonological and Grammatical Variation

The social class (Holmes 1992) suggests that "women are more status-conscious than men" and that is because women have an inner belief that the way they speak reflects their social class in society and, thus, tend to speak more properly than men. So, women "use more standard speech forms as a way of claiming such status". Also, Women are supposed to use more HRT (high-rise terminal) or uptalk. Reasons for this usage include a woman's desire to maintain hold of the floor (remember that women work harder to maintain hold of the floor) and their desire to invite their interlocutor to participate in the conversation. Another is the high-pitched voice because of physiological reasons, but scientists point out that this is also associated with women's "timidity", "emotional instability," and "gentility."

Lakoff (1975) notes that women typically respond to a question with a rising intonation pattern rather than a falling intonation. In this way, they can demonstrate their gentleness, but sometimes this intonation reveals a lack of confidence. On the contrary, men often use falling intonation to convey that they are quite certain of what they are saying. Falling intonation also shows men's confidence and sometimes power. Women are more likely to use discourse particles such as "like," "you know," "sorta," and "kinda." In fact, according to Cameron (2007), women generally exhibit the following characteristics: language and communication matter more to women than to men, and women tend to talk more than men. Women are more verbally skilled than men. Men's goals in using language tend to be about getting things done, whereas women's tend to be about making connections with other people. Men talk more about things and facts, whereas women talk more about people, relationships and feelings. Men's way of using language is competitive, reflecting their general interest in acquiring and maintaining status; women's use of language is cooperative, reflecting their preference for equality and harmony.

These differences routinely lead to “miscommunication” between the sexes, with each sex misinterpreting the other’s intentions. This causes problems in contexts where men and women regularly interact, especially in heterosexual relationships.

5. Methodology

This study is qualitative, as it describes and interprets Bobrisky's speeches. Thus, the data for this study consists of three of Bobrisky's video contents. Therefore, the three selected video contents of Bobrisky are used for the study. The contents were collected from his/her Instagram page. The choice of the selected video content is informed by the kind of newfound gender identity in which Bobrisky presents the speeches.

6. Theoretical Framework and Analytical Procedure

The data is analysed based on the theory of Dominance propounded by Robin Lakoff in 1975 as a way to challenge the traditional perception of women's communication by Jespersen's deficit theory which states that: women tend to think before speaking, women use unfinished sentences, women have a smaller vocabulary than men, women use more emotional language than men, women prefer standard language and avoid slang, while men are more likely to use technical terms, and women with higher education tend to avoid slang and profanity, while educated men may use them in their speech. In her submission, however, Lakoff argues that girls were socialized to use language that portrayed them as the weaker gender. Lakoff also notes that women tend to speak less frequently than men, often using brief phrases like “mmm” or “yes” to indicate attention. Additionally, she identified certain characteristics of a “woman's register,” including.

Hedging, using indirect language such as “sort of” or “kind of”

Rising intonation in statements, indicating uncertainty,

Using “empty” adjectives like adorable, divine, charming or lovely.

I am being excessively polite, such as using euphemisms or indirect requests.

Using tag questions at the end of statements to seek validation.

The data for the current study would, therefore, be analysed using the above characteristics as proposed by Lakoff. Similarly, a comparative analytical approach would be used to gauge the data with that of Jespersen Deficit Theory to identify which among the theories describes Bobrisky's speeches with regard to gender and genderisation.

7. Data Presentation and Analysis

The major claims of the deficit theory are: women tend to think before speaking, women use unfinished sentences, women have a smaller vocabulary than men, women use more emotional language than men, women prefer standard language and avoid slang, while men are more likely to use technical terms, and women with higher education tend to avoid slang and profanity, while educated men may use them in their speech. Now consider the data below. Applying the deficit theory to data one, it is evident that the data does not align with most of the claims of the deficit theory.

Data 1

I want all the girls on my page to come forward

Come and listen to your mummy of Lagos

Okay! A lot of you girls, you don't know how to take care of yourself

You are just called girl for nothing

And as a woman, you need to take care of yourself, you need to touch yourself, you need to be on point every time

Some of you go to your boyfriend's house and you smell that's why some of these guys they gossip among themselves Oh! that girl smell mhmhm that girl I think she got an infection ddddddd

Any way I have brought some products for you to help your life

This product is infection flusher yes If you feel you have an Infection or if you feel you are not comfortable or there is some discharge or there is some unpleasant smell from your sugar gate

Please rush to rams herbs yes rams herbs sell the best products for ladies.

From the data above, it is evident that some of the major claims of the deficit theory do not apply to the data. For instance, none of the sentences reflect any of the claims of the deficit theory because all the sentences were said with a kind of spontaneity, which debunks the notion that women think before they speak. Similarly, the sentences are complete sentences, which is against the claims that women used unfinished sentences. Again, the use of slang expressions, such as "*sugar gates*," repudiates the belief held by deficit theory that women avoid using slang expressions in their speech. However, the use of emotional language in the above advert may tend to prove the applicability and viability of the deficit theory in describing women's speech. Thus, the use of emotional language in the above data may be interpreted as context-dependent choice. That is to say, the use of emotional language is informed by the field of discourse, which is central to the linguistic choices a speaker makes. These findings reveal that, although Bobrisky claims to be a man, his speeches expose his true identity, making the theory an essential tool for determining Bobrisky's gender as a man, since his speech doesn't fit into the basics of the theory.

On the contrary, applying dominance theory to the above data reveals a different understanding of the speeches of Bobrisky, revealing a different identity. Take, for instance, expressions such as "I want all the girls on my page to come forward. Come and listen to your mummy of Lagos.

Okay! A lot of you girls, you don't know how to take care of yourself

"You are just called girl for nothing" indicates how Bobrisky wields power through language, speaking authoritatively as a mummy of Lagos, thus putting himself over and above all the girls in his audience, demonstrating some kind of dominance in his use of language. Speaking like a master, cast down to the womanhood of Bobrisky, since, for Lakoff, girls were socialized to use language that portrayed them as the weaker gender.

Data 2

Look at me

Na me even fine pass

See my dress

See my dress

Tell your favourite to show you what they are wearing heyyyyyyy Abbasss you do this one you do this one for me

See my dress

Everybody Bobrisky you look so pretty

Oh my God you look elegant

You look sexy

Na so e be o abi mummy of Lagos

From the data above, Bobrisky is completely egoistic and boastful; his cocky behaviour shows a contrary opinion to what Lakoff observed that women tend to be excessively polite

by being humble, modest and maybe timid. Also, no matter how he tries to imitate the female gender, he realised Bobrisky exhibits the character of men, as they are always competitive and want it to reflect their general interest in acquiring and maintaining it. In his use of language, for instance, phrases like “see my dress,” “na me fine pass,” and “tell your favourite to show you what they are wearing...” Bobrisky is excessively trying to show that he is better than most women and has a better sense of dressing. On the other hand, considering the deficit theory, which posits that women are more emotional than men, the data above does not indicate how emotional Bobrisky is. Instead, he is so optimistic, full of energy and highly excited and eager to show off his achievement of winning the best-dressed female, which brought about this data 2.

Lakoff added that women use adjectives to express themselves, in the case of Bobrisky judging from the data his use of adjectives was context-dependent for instance, “Everybody Bobrisky you look so pretty”, “Oh my God you look elegant”, “You look sexy” all the use of adjectives in the lines were context dependent because they were compliments that was given to him by other people “everybody” as he clearly stated. The only time he used it was once, when he said, “Na me even fine pass.” The instances given above clearly show that Bobrisky has deviated from his psychological and biological design as a woman and is only trying so hard to fit into the circle.

According to Lakoff’s observation, when it comes to verbosity, women tend to speak less frequently than men. Bobrisky, from all indications, has betrayed this because, in every context, he is eager to run to his Instagram page to update his followers on every sphere of achievement.

Data 3

Press you boobs

Stop allowing him squeeze you boobs

Mhmmn mmhmm mhm (nods head sideways)

Because these are the same people that would go out there and be saying

Look at those two fallen slippers, look at those two fallen heroes

Your boobs are your priority, they are your market

From the data above, looking at deficit theory, Bobrisky exhibits more of the men’s use of language by using slang and profanity. A traditional belief about the differences between men and women is the use of swearing and vulgar language. Also, Lakoff claimed that while men use stronger expletives, women are politer. This is a clear example of such from the data above. Women will not come to their page on social media and utter words like boobs, or use derogatory words like “fallen heroes” or “fallen slippers” because it is considered not ladylike, or have a great sense of low self-esteem and an inferiority complex. This comes because every woman understands that they have a different body type and may find it highly insulting to talk about the body types this way.

Furthermore, Lakoff highlighted that the use of question tags is attributed to women because they are more tentative in their speech. Women also use more hedges because they want to be indirect when it comes to their language use. This is contrary to that of Bobrisky because all these seem to be absent in his use of language, although it can be attributed to the fact that man cannot cheat nature. His use of language here also goes further to demonstrate the aggressiveness of his speech style, even though it is couched in bits of advice. It only goes a long way to show that his biological traits cannot be hidden, no matter what his new gender realisation is. Having seen all these observations, Bobrisky may be

unconsciously exhibiting them because he is not fully aware of how the biological system of women works.

Generally, from the above data, Bobrisky's use of language exhibits that his focus is less on feelings and more on information, facts, knowledge and competence. This is glaringly evident in all the data, as seen in "See my Dress". He is quite instrumental as he is hinged on problem-solving and defining status. He is also assertive as he states facts rather than opinions and he always enjoys dominance or control of the conversation to gain power, for instance, "Come and listen to your mummy of Lagos."

8. Conclusion

This paper investigated, from a psycholinguistic perspective, the concept of transgenderisation and language production by Bobrisky. The study explores the utterances produced by Bobrisky, whose gender identity is different from the sex he was assigned at birth, or who identified himself as female. The study was based on both primary and secondary sources of data, utilizing the dominance theory of Lakoff (1975) as its theoretical framework. The paper argued that, although Bobrisky claims to be a woman, his speeches expose his true identity, making the theory an essential tool for determining Bobrisky's gender as male, since his speech does not fit the basics of the theory. Again, it clearly shows that Bobrisky has deviated from his psychological and biological design as a man and is only trying so hard to fit into the other circle. The study observed that Bobrisky is caught in a serious identity crisis, for his linguistic mannerisms as well as his use of language betray his new self-imposed gender. His speech reveals that he is also assertive, as he states facts rather than opinions, and he consistently seeks to maintain dominance or control of the conversation to exert power.

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