

FEMALE NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION IN SELECTED IGBO DRAMA

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Abstract: This work is on “Female nonverbal communication in some selected Igbo drama” The society consists of male and female making them exist side by side and communicate together. This makes it impossible discussing the females in isolation of the males. Male and female characters during communication exhibit idiosyncrasies in language that show differences in gender both verbally and nonverbally. The aim of this work therefore is to investigate the females’ nonverbal communication against that of the males in the society with a culture that prioritizes the roles and communication of males against those of the females. Females most often communicate nonverbally to portray their protest and exonerate themselves from humiliation from the males. The work adopts survey design and, purposive sampling technique was used to collect data. A total of four Igbo plays were selected from three playwrights, two plays from a female playwright and two plays, one each from a male playwright. It is discovered that in the Igbo patriarchal society, females most often communicate nonverbally to free themselves from male humiliation, subjugation and also to actualize self. The study suggests that males should see their female counterparts as normal human beings and stop suppressing and relegating them to the background thereby necessitating their use of nonverbal communication to show their protest.

IndexTerms: Nonverbal, Paralinguistic, Communication, Female, Subjugation.

I Introduction

All over the world both in the ancient and contemporary times, communication has been an important part of both animal and human existence. God gave all mammals means of communication both verbal and nonverbal. However, it is only human beings that have the prerogative of communicating verbally or linguistically, while animals communicate nonverbally or paralinguistically. Human being also have the extra gift of communicating paralinguistically or nonverbally.

For communicating linguistically, language is required. There are different languages spoken by different races in the world. These races are made up of males and females living together and communicating although, differently. Their language may be the same but their style of communication differs.

African languages including, Igbo language from which the data of analysis for this study is taken belong to the kwa group of languages. The study, though, is not on linguistic mode of communication but on paralinguistic mode of communication. It looks at how females communicate nonverbally in Igbo society.

Nonverbal or paralinguistics mode of communication has something to do with culture because culture determines nonverbal mode of communication as culture is expressed in conversational interaction. It is one aspect that helps to influence how learning activities are organized.

In many indigenous communities, for example, there is often an emphasis on nonverbal communication which acts as a valuable means by which children learn. In this sense, learning is not dependent on verbal communication rather, on nonverbal communication which serves as a primary means of not only organizing interpersonal interaction, but also conveying cultural values. Children learn how to participate in this system from a young age (Anderson, 2007). For instance, when I was growing up as a young girl, my mother of blessed memory used to correct me to sit well and close my legs by bringing both her palms together as if supplicating to God. This will make me to close my legs immediately.

Nonverbal communication involves the conscious and unconscious processes of encoding and decoding. Encoding is the act of generating information such as facial expressions, gestures and postures. Encoding information utilizes signals which we may think to be universal. Decoding is the interpretation of information from received sensation given by the encoder. It involves utilizing knowledge one may have of certain received sensations. Examples of encoding processes are facial expression, gestures, postures, tone of voices, tactile stimulations such as touch and body movements like when someone moves closer to communicate or steps away due to spatial boundaries. The decoding processes involve the use of received sensations combined with previous experience with understanding and meaning of communicating with others.

II. Literature Review

Nonverbal or paralinguistic communication is the type of communication where signs and gestures etc, are used to communicate ideas, needs etc. Dressing, actions and even body scent are also used. Paralinguistic mode of communication may add emphasis or shades of meaning to verbal communication. For an expression to be paralinguistic, it has to be culturally determined, nonverbal and an integral part of conversational interaction and is also consciously controlled (Wikipedia, 2006). Deliberate silence is also a nonverbal type of communication.

Mifflin (2006) says that a language that uses a system of manual, facial and other body movements as the means of communication is nonverbal language. His assertion is true for no spoken word is involved. Seymour-Smith (1986) said that nonverbal mode of communication is the substantive mode which involves concrete materials and substances. This is true because when communication is not verbal, concrete things are used such as hands, legs, face, thumbs etc to communicate.

According to Martins and Nakayama (2010), smiling is also a universal nonverbal behaviour and this involves the use of the face. He further explains that what might lead to the smile vary from culture to culture. This goes to substantiate the assertion that nonverbal communication is determined by the culture of the people involved in the communication exercise. In their own contribution, Alan and Babara (2004) contend that nonverbal communication like other forms of communication is influenced by context and varies among individuals within a particular cultural group. These cultural variations as in Kinestics involve the way we gesture, use head movements and eye contacts. It also involves emblems which are gestures that correspond to a word and an agreed on meaning. In nonverbal communication, when we use our fingers to count, we are using emblematic gestures, but even our own ways of counting varies from among cultures. For instance, the “thumb up” gesture can mean “one” in main land Europe “Up you” in Greece (although thrust forward) but “well done” in Igbo.

Nonverbal communication is mostly emotional in nature meaning that, it is spontaneous and one cannot fake it (Rob Smentek, 2016). He said that the most common and telling nonverbal means of communication is through facial expression. Such include smiling, frowning, blinking eyelids, eye rolling, twitching of eyebrow, flaring of the nostrils. Each of these articulate volumes of information with ease. Body movement is also another nonverbal mode of communication. This includes common practices like hand gestures, nodding of the head. Most often, body movements convey enthusiasm or excitement. There are also actions that portray nervousness in body movement such as involuntary tremours or shaking of legs.

According to Smentek (2016) body posture is another type of nonverbal means of communication. He said that how you stand or sit is an important element of how others perceives you. Standing with head held high and back straight for instance, exudes assurance, confidence and strength. But one who is slouched or facing the floor demonstrates uncertainty. Some positions show defiance or resistance. In most societies of the world particularly in Africa, women are placed below men in all ramifications and are subdued. Most often, particularly these days, they react or protest. But in Karl Marx theory, he suggests protest as a way of showing resistance although he advises that it should be applied with caution.

Women also protest their subjugated position nonverbally. Okafor (2002) in her poem “Xwa xmx Nwaany[” meaning “The World of Women” or “Women’s World”, expresses women’s separatedness, unfairness and shown women’s oppositional stance using Bopoto nonverbal language in Zimbabwe against the males where they theatrically engage subordination to show protest. Bopoto is a nonverbal or noise making rebellious action taken by Shona women in Zimbabwe to show non acceptability of some actions against them by the males. It shows how women can use their relegation to undermine the order of “men’s world” through subversion of language. Bopoto takes the form of a woman contravening the normal order of communication by remaining silent (nonverbal) or making noise. The action takes various forms depending on the predilection of the oppressed subject. Rebellion is the basis on which the women build subversive behaviours such as silence, refusing to eat any food and exposing her thighs and legs. This action can go on for hours or days depending on the impact on the oppressive agent and members of the society who interject as the spectators. The performance requires spectators for its effectiveness even while solution is being sought (Okafor, 2002).

Other forms of nonverbal communication are eye contact, which is the best way for building rapport with a stranger. Eye contact can show interest, attention and involvement, but failing to make eye contact can mean disinterest, inattentiveness or rudeness.

III. Female Nonverbal Communication in The Selected Drama Texts.

Dramatic genre is used for analysis because drama is seen as a performance as well as literature and because of its theatricality and linguistic mode. It is used in this work to show nonverbal communication of females against the backdrop of their subjugation by the males.

In Nwaozuzu (1991), Ochediye the wife of Igwe Oduenyi, and the heroine of the play is shown as eavesdropping on the conversation between Igwe Oduenyi, her husband and his cabinet members. Igwe Oduenyi is giving his cabinet chiefs instruction to make Ubaji his first son by his late first wife Igwe in the event of his death. On hearing the instruction by Ochediye while eavesdropping, she purses her mouth and nods her head. She by her action, has communicated nonverbally her not accepting the fact that her husband wants the son of his late first wife, her co-wife to succeed him on his throne and not her, Ochediye’s son. This is the way Nwaozuzu puts Ochediye’s nonverbal communication of her protest:

(Ochediye nqdx ebe q na-elephta anya, mie qnx, kwe n’isi (Pp/6)- Ochediye from her peeping position purses her mouth and nods her head)

Ochediye’s pursing of her mouth and nodding of her head cynically communicates her refusal that Ubaji should succeed Igwe Oduenyi on the throne. It also shows her intention of depriving Ubaji the throne. This is a nonverbal communication through facial expression showing protest.

Nwaozuzu, (2009) shows an example of body movement type of nonverbal communication where Ikeagwumbe, the village wrestler stops Eruru, the orphan and her friends on their way back from the stream from where they went to fetch water. He asks them to give him some water to drink. The nonverbal mode of communication he uses is by the waving of his hand for them to stop. Nwaozuzu portrays it thus:

Ikegwumbe:

..... (O meere Eruru ha aka, ha atq kwxs[, o jekwuru ha) – He waves his hand to Eruru as an order and the three stop ped...He goes to them)

It is Eruru, the orphan that gives him water to drink and this sets the stage for their eventual marriage. It also demonstrates the fact that one can meet his spouse any where either on the way to the stream, market, moonlight game places etc. His type of hand waving shows an order for them to stop. Another nonverbal communication in the same text is shown when Uriqnx, Eruru's stepmother sends Eruru to the dreaded market of the spirits called "Eke Ukpana Nd[Mmxq]" to buy her a non edible fish "Mpete". She wants Eruru dead for, nobody goes to that market and comes back alive. The nonverbal communication involves body movement and facial expression. Nwaozuzu puts it this way:

Urionu....(Q Kwapu Eruru... ya na nwa ya dapx n'qch[])-(Pp.She pushes Eruru out..... She and her daughter break out in laughter)

The nonverbal communication involving body movement is where Uriqnx pushes Eruru out to start going to the market of the spirits while that of the facial expression is where she and her daughter break out in laughter.

Shedding of tears is also a nonverbal communication. Tears tell a lot about ones feelings which may communicate sadness, joy, tension, restiveness and helplessness. Onyekaonwx (1985) showcases such nonverbal communication through shedding of tears when Orijei Ogbunanjq, the mother of Otoko and Xdxakx as well as the wife of Okwuike Ogbunanajo starts to shed tears when her children ask her to tell them who their father is. The tears help in communicating to the children that what they are about to hear about their father will not be complementary.

Onyekaonwx puts it thus:

..... (anya mmiri apxtawa ya n'anya, ya akwxs[tx hichapx anya mmiri xmx ya a na ejigide ya).... (pp5)-Tears start to come out from her eyes, she stops a little, gently wiping her tears. Her children are comforting her.

Body movement is also shown here where Orijei is using her hands to wipe her tears. This shows her effort to stop crying. Also her children holding and comforting her is body movement showing their helping to console their mother. These actions are nonverbal communications for they did not say anything although they help in communicating linguistically.

Onyekaonwu (1985) also showcases body language as a nonverbal means of communication when the nurse involved in swapping Mrs. Okwuolisa's son at birth with Mrs. Obiakq's baby girl visits Mrs. Obiakq suddenly and refuses to be entertained. The nurse's visit is on the advice of her prophet to confess the crime of baby swapping they are involved in twenty years ago. When the nurse asks Mr. Ochonganooko Obiakq to call some of his kinsmen that she wants to talk to them, Mrs. Xdxakx Obiakq shows her fears nonverbally by the way her body was shaking Onyekaonwx puts it this way:

Uduaku:

N'ahx na olu na ama jiiji (pg 70)- In the body and voice that is shaking

The shaking of Xdxakx's body is a nonverbal body language, communicating her fears that her secret sin is about to be exposed. It will expose the fact that she has no son but another daughter and that she has deceived her husband into settling down with her. Xdxakx deceit prevented her husband from getting another wife who would have borne him a male child to continue his lineage.

Asogwa (2004) exhibits facial expression as nonverbal communication where Onyed[mma the heroine of the play is not happy with her father. This is shown in her facial expression when her father is pouring encomiums on his son Obinna, who happens to be her brother when he returns from the city. Her father wants her brother home to complain to him about her wayward behavior.

Her father's praises of her brother which unfortunately he never gives to her due to her wayward life arouses her unhappy disposition towards her father. Asogwa shows Onyed [mma's facial expression of displeasure in nonverbal communication thus:

Onyed [mma: (were otu akxxkx anya na -arq nna ya...) (pp 25) - Eyeing her father disdainfully with one side of her eye

This is a case of nonverbal communication through disdainful rolling of her eyes.

IV. Conclusion

This study shows that Igbo dramatic works can favourably compete with dramatic works of other cultures of the world. It also portrays the fact that females communicate both nonverbally and verbally in Igbo as in other cultures.

The study also looked at the different ways females communicate nonverbally like facial expression, body movement, body posture, rebellion, silence and shedding of tears. It is also observed that nonverbal communication is often used by females to free themselves from male dominance and also for self actualization in our patriarchal society.

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