

Sociolinguistic Variations and Gender Differences in Language Usage Among Medical Students in Bayelsa State

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D.O.I: 10.56201/ijgem.v10.no3.2024.pg81.88

Abstract

Sociolinguistic variations in the context of gender represent a fascinating and intricate field of study, delving into the multifaceted ways language intertwines with societal constructs of gender. The study examined sociolinguistic variations and gender differences in language usage among medical students in Bayelsa State, Nigeria. A correlational survey design was adopted for the study. Two research questions and hypotheses were raised to guide the study. The population of the study consists of all medical of the three medical tertiary institutions in Bayelsa State. A sample of 399, which consists of 199 nurses, 70 medical laboratory scientists, 50 information officers, and 80 pharmacists randomly drawn from the population, was used in the study. The instrument for data collection was a “Sociolinguistic Variations and Gender Differences in Language Usage Questionnaire (SVGDLUQ)” developed by the researcher and validated by a specialist. The instrument's reliability was established using the Cronbach Alpha Formula, and a coefficient value of 0.72 was obtained. The research questions were answered, and hypotheses were tested using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC). It was revealed that there is a solid and positive relationship between sociolinguistic variations and gender differences in language usage among medical students in Bayelsa State. It was recommended that stakeholders encourage education and awareness programs that celebrate linguistic diversity, fostering respect for different communication styles among genders within the medical world.

Keywords: *Sociolinguistic Variations, Gender Differences, Language Usage, Medical Students*

Introduction

In the labyrinthine realm of linguistic diversity, the tapestry of sociolinguistic variations unfolds its intricate threads, weaving a narrative that mirrors the cultural nuances and social dynamics of a particular community. In the heart of Bayelsa State, Nigeria, a captivating exploration beckons—one that delves into the profound intersection of language and gender among the future custodians of healthcare, the medical students. Kamal (2017) disclosed the distinctive linguistic landscape of Bayelsa State becomes a canvas upon which sociolinguistic variations paint a portrait of communication intricacies, and within this canvas, the divergence of language use among medical students takes center stage.

At the crossroads of linguistic inquiry and social observation, sociolinguistic variations spotlight how language adapts and molds itself within the contours of diverse social settings. The context of Bayelsa State, nestled within the vibrant tapestry of Nigerian culture, becomes an evocative backdrop for understanding how linguistic patterns ebb and flow in the corridors of medical education. Daba, (2017) submitted that amidst the verdant landscapes and dynamic urban centers, the language that resonates within the hallowed halls of medical institutions unveils layers of significance tied to regional identity and the inherent gender dynamics entrenched in societal norms.

Gender, a perennial force shaping the intricate dance of human interaction, assumes a distinctive role in the linguistic choreography of Bayelsa's medical students. Mashiri, (2019) reported that it is within this scholarly pursuit that the nuances of language—its cadence, lexicon, and pragmatics—become a mirror reflecting the imprints of gender differences. The discourse takes flight as we navigate through the linguistic labyrinth, seeking to unravel how medical students, poised at the intersection of academia and societal expectations, articulate their thoughts, ideas, and professional aspirations through the prism of gender-specific language patterns. Intellectual voyage through the corridors of sociolinguistic inquiry, we will traverse the diverse landscapes of Bayelsa State, engaging with the rich tapestry of dialects, colloquial expressions, and linguistic subtleties that shape the communicative landscape of medical education. The unfolding narrative seeks not only to unravel the linguistic intricacies but also to decipher the underlying societal structures that propel and perpetuate gender-specific language norms among the medical intelligentsia.

Brown and Gilman (2016) submitted that sociolinguistic research on gender involves analyzing how linguistic choices can either reinforce traditional gender stereotypes or challenge societal norms. This critical examination sheds light on how language contributes to the perpetuation or transformation of gender roles, stereotypes, and power structures within communities. Exploring sociolinguistic variations and gender encompasses a vast and intricate landscape, delving into the interconnections between language, culture, and societal expectations surrounding gender. Hence, this study examined sociolinguistic variations and gender differences in language usage among medical students in Bayelsa State.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The study examined sociolinguistic variations and gender differences in language usage among medical students in Bayelsa State. Specifically, the study achieved the following:

- i. Determine the relationship between social variations and gender differences among medical students in language usage in Bayelsa State.
- ii. Determine the relationship between cultural variations and gender differences among medical students in language usage in Bayelsa State.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised to guide the study:

- i. What is the relationship between social variations and gender differences among medical students in language usage in Bayelsa State?
- ii. What is the relationship between cultural variations and gender differences among medical students in language usage in Bayelsa State?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance:

H₀1: There is no significant relationship between social variations and gender differences among medical students in language usage in Bayelsa State.

H02: There is no significant relationship between cultural variations and gender differences among medical students in language usage in Bayelsa State.

Literature Review

Conceptual Clarification

Sociolinguistics has been defined as the study of language in its social context. The study of language in its social context means crucially the study of linguistic variation. In different social contexts, an individual will speak in different ways. This is called stylistic variation. Moreover, speakers who differ from each other in terms of age, gender, social class, ethnic group, for example, will also differ from each other in their speech, even in the same context - this is called social variation.

Sociolinguistic variations in the context of gender refer to the multifaceted study of how language use, communication patterns, and linguistic behaviors intersect with the social constructs of gender within diverse cultural, social, and individual contexts. This field of inquiry examines the intricate relationship between language and gender, focusing on the ways in which linguistic practices both reflect and shape perceptions, expressions, and performances of gender within societies.

Sociolinguistic variations and gender represent a complex and dynamic field of study that illuminates the intricate interplay between language, gender, and society. This multidimensional exploration uncovers the ways in which language both reflects and shapes perceptions, performances, and constructions of gender within diverse social and cultural contexts.

Empirical Review

Salihu (2014) examined the choice, the shifts and the gender differential linguistics style of the use of names in a Hausa community. Social gender is an essential, stable category in the context of speech because it is perpetually (re) produced via language and communication. Addressing in Hausa society is influenced by the Cultural Revolution in Hausa land. The emphasis is on the discussion of the types of names the Hausas utilize, the context in which they are applied, the semantics, and the circumstance that motivated their creation, the addresser and the addressee's relationship, the historical, cognitive, and ideological reality which determined the choice, the changes and the address variants.

Edebo (2010) examined sociolinguistic analysis of the gender on language use. The method of investigation used for this study is questionnaire and audio-recoding. This study has established the fact that the differences between male and female in ways of interacting often leads to wrong notions, meanings and interpretations given to certain statements and gestures. It was also discovered that the differences between male female in the aspects of turn taking, use of minimal responses, use of questions, shift between topics, loud and aggressive arguments, often result in miscommunication and misinterpretation and when this happens, it leads to breakdown in communication.

Methodology

Correlational design was adopted for this study. The population of the study consist of all medical students in the three health tertiary institutions in Bayelsa State. A sample of 399 which consist of 199 nurses, 70 medical laboratory scientist, 50 information officers and 80 pharmacists randomly drawn from the population was used in the study. In other to ensure greater representation of the sample relative to the population and guarantees that minority constituents are well represented, the proportionate stratified random sampling technique with a sample fraction ratio of 0.02 was used to draw out the 399 respondents. The instrument for data collection was a "Sociolinguistic Variations and Gender Differences in Language Usage

Questionnaire (SVGDLUQ)” developed by the researcher. It consists of four (4) sections, namely; Section A, B, C and D. Section A measured the demographic variables of the respondents, Section B consist of 7-items on the cultural variations. Section C consist of 7-items on social variations and section D consist of 7-items on gender difference in Language Usage. The content and face validity of the instrument was done by medical experts and biostatistics. The reliability of the instrument was established using Cronbach Alpha Formula and a coefficient value of 0.82 was obtained, which was considered appropriate for the study. The research question was answered and hypotheses tested using Pearson Product Moment Correlation. Online mode of questionnaire distribution was adopted through the approved WhatsApp platform of various medical class. In all, 100% return rate was achieved.

Research Questions

Research Question 1

What is the relationship between social variations and gender differences in language usage among medical students in Bayelsa State?

Table 2: Pearson Correlations analysis showing relationship between social variations and gender differences in language usage among medical students’

Variables		Social Variations	Gender Differences	Decision
Social variations	Pearson correlation	1	0.612	H ₀ rejected
	Sig.		0.00*	
	N	399	308	
Gender Differences	Pearson correlation	0.612	1	
	Sig	0.00*		
	N	399	399	

***Significant; p<0.05**

Presented in Table 2 above is the Correlational Analysis showing relationship between social variations and gender differences in language usage among medical students’ in Bayelsa State. The correlation coefficient (r) is .612. The coefficient falls into the range .61–.80 for strong and positive relationship. This implies that there is a strong and positive relationship between social variations and gender differences in language usage among medical students in Bayelsa State.

Research Question 2

What is the relationship between cultural variations and gender differences in language usage among medical students in Bayelsa State?

Table 3: Pearson Correlations analysis showing relationship between social variations and gender differences in language usage among medical students’

Variables		Cultural Variations	Gender Differences	Decision
cultural Variations	Pearson correlation	1	0.512	H ₀ rejected
	Sig.		0.00*	
	N	399	399	

Gender Differences	Pearson correlation	0.512	1
	Sig	0.00*	
	N	399	399

***Significant; $p < 0.05$**

Presented in Table 3 above is the Correlational Analysis showing relationship between cultural variations and gender differences in language usage among medical students' in Bayelsa State. The correlation coefficient (r) is .512. The coefficient falls into the range .61–.80 for strong and positive relationship. This implies that there is a strong and positive relationship between cultural variations and gender differences in language usage among medical students in Bayelsa State.

Hypotheses

H0₁: There is no significant relationship between social variations and gender differences in language usage among medical students in Bayelsa State.

The result in table 2 shows the Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis on the relationship between social variations and gender differences in language usage among medical students in Bayelsa State. The result revealed that the p -value is 0.000 which is less than 0.05 ($p \leq 0.005$), hence the null hypothesis is rejected. Thus, there is a significant relationship between social variations and gender differences in language usage among medical students in Bayelsa State.

H0₂: There is no significant relationship between cultural variations and gender differences in language usage among medical students in Bayelsa State.

The result in table 3 shows the Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis on the relationship between cultural variations and gender differences in language usage among medical students in Bayelsa State. The result revealed that the p -value is 0.000 which is less than 0.05 ($p \leq 0.005$), hence the null hypothesis is rejected. Thus, there is a significant relationship between cultural variations and gender differences in language usage among medical students in Bayelsa State.

Discussion of Findings

The study revealed that there is a strong and positive relationship between social variations and gender differences in language usage among medical students in Bayelsa State. Also, the affirmed that there exists a significant relationship between social variations and gender differences among medical students in language usage in Bayelsa State. This supports Salihu (2014) examined the choice, the shifts and the gender differential linguistics style of the use of names in a Hausa community and reported a strong positive relationship.

The study revealed that there is a strong and positive relationship between cultural variations and gender differences in language usage among medical students in Bayelsa State. Also, the study affirmed that there exist is a significant relationship between cultural variations and gender differences among medical students in language usage in Bayelsa State. This supports Edebo (2010) who examined sociolinguistic analysis of the gender on language use.

Conclusion

The study examined sociolinguistic variations and gender differences in language usage among medical students in Bayelsa State. This study has established a strong and positive relationship between sociolinguistic variations and gender differences in language usage among medical

students in Bayelsa State. Examining how social differences influence gendered language expressions reveals the intricate interplay between societal factors and linguistic behaviors among diverse gender identities.

In conclusion, the study on sociolinguistic variations and gender differences in language usage among medical students in Bayelsa State sheds light on the intricate relationship between language, gender, and professional discourse. The findings underscore the presence of distinct sociolinguistic patterns and gender-related differences in the language used by medical students, revealing the nuanced ways language reflects and reinforces societal norms within the medical education context.

The sociolinguistic variations observed encompassed linguistic choices and communication styles, with implications for interpersonal dynamics within the medical community. The study highlights the importance of understanding and addressing these variations to enhance effective communication and collaboration among medical professionals, ultimately contributing to improved patient care.

Furthermore, the gender differences identified in language usage among medical students emphasize the need for a more inclusive and equitable approach to medical education. Recognizing and challenging gender-related language disparities can foster a more supportive learning environment, empowering all students to thrive regardless of gender. This insight is particularly relevant in the context of the evolving landscape of healthcare, where diverse perspectives and effective communication are crucial for addressing complex medical challenges.

In conclusion, the study further explores the intersection of language, gender, and professional identity within medical education. By acknowledging and addressing sociolinguistic variations, medical institutions can cultivate a more inclusive and collaborative learning environment, ultimately contributing to developing competent and culturally sensitive healthcare professionals.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusion, the following recommendations were given:

- i. Encourage education and awareness programs that celebrate linguistic diversity, fostering respect for different communication styles among genders within medical world.
- ii. Advocate for inclusive language policies in medical tertiary institutions, workplaces, and media to promote equitable representations and respect for diverse gender identities within medical pre-service practitioners.

iii.

iv. Policy Recommendation

- v. Developing policies to address sociolinguistic variations and gender differences in language usage among medical students in Bayelsa State requires a nuanced and comprehensive approach. Here are some policy recommendations:
- vi. **Inclusive Language Training Programs:** Implement inclusive language training programs that raise awareness about sociolinguistic variations and gender differences in language usage. Offer workshops and seminars to medical students, faculty, and staff to foster understanding and sensitivity towards diverse linguistic backgrounds and gender expressions.

- vii. **Curriculum Integration:** Integrate modules on sociolinguistics and gender-sensitive language usage into the medical curriculum. This should cover effective communication with patients from different linguistic backgrounds and gender-sensitive medical terminology.
- viii. **Diversity and Inclusion Committees:** Establish a diversity and inclusion committee within medical institutions to address linguistic and gender-related issues. This committee can monitor and evaluate the implementation of policies, as well as provide a platform for students to express concerns.
- ix. **Cultural Competency Training:** Integrate cultural competency training into the medical education system, emphasizing the importance of understanding and respecting diverse linguistic and gender norms to improve doctor-patient communication.
- x. **Mentorship Programs:** Create mentorship programs where senior medical students or faculty members can guide and support their peers in navigating sociolinguistic variations and gender-related challenges in their academic and clinical experiences.
- xi. **Research and Data Collection:** Research the sociolinguistic variations and gender differences in language usage among medical students in Bayelsa State. Use the findings to inform policy decisions and tailor interventions to specific needs.
- xii. **Faculty Development Programs:** Offer training programs for faculty members to enhance their awareness of sociolinguistic variations and gender differences. Faculty should serve as role models in promoting inclusive language practices.
- xiii. **Community Engagement:** Foster partnerships with local communities to understand and respect linguistic and gender diversity. This can help bridge the gap between medical professionals and the communities they serve, leading to better patient outcomes.
- xiv. **Anonymous Reporting Mechanism:** Implement an anonymous reporting mechanism for students who experience or witness linguistic or gender-based discrimination. This will encourage reporting and allow institutions to address issues promptly.
- xv. **Regular Policy Review:** Establish a regular review process for these policies to ensure their effectiveness and relevance. Solicit feedback from students, faculty, and other stakeholders to make necessary adjustments.
- xvi.
- xvii. Implementing these policies can contribute to a more inclusive and supportive environment for medical students in Bayelsa State. It can foster effective communication and promote a culture of respect for sociolinguistic variations and gender differences.

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